

The Gospel of John (92) **Jesus, the True Vine**

When we turn to John 15 we read further of our Lord's last words to His apostles just before He was arrested and taken from them to be crucified. Here our Lord speaks of Himself as the source of life, even of fruitful life, for His people. Here we learn of the blessings of abiding in Jesus Christ and the consequences of failing to do so. May our God give us greater understanding of our union with our Savior and the greater desire and appreciation to experience more fully the blessing of abiding in Him. Here are the words of Jesus in **John 15:1-10**:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

⁵"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Many commentators attempt to explain these words as though the Gospel writer was depicting the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. They see reference to Jesus as the bread from heaven in John 6 to set forth the bread in the Lord's Supper. And they see the vine here in John 15 as setting forth the wine in the cup of the Eucharist. But this interpretation is not warranted, for

"There is precious little to support this interpretation. There is no hint of believers drinking the fruit of the vine (cf. Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18); indeed, there is no mention of wine at all, still less a connection with Jesus' blood. 'The truth is that John is speaking of union of believers with Christ, apart from whom they can do nothing. This union, originating in His initiative and sealed by His death on their behalf, is completed by the believers' responsive love and obedience, and is the essence of Christianity (Barrett, p. 470).¹

The Lord's Supper is not the subject of our Lord's words that are before us.

In order to assist us in better understanding these words, we may consider the following two divisions. First, we read of the close and intimate relationship of the disciples to their Savior (15:1-4). And then secondly, we read of the fruitful life of the one who abides in Christ (15:5-8).

I. The close and intimate relationship of the disciples to their Savior (15:1-4)

Our Lord Jesus declared that He is the source through which His Father imparts life to His people. Jesus declared in **verse 1**, "*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.*" Although Jesus set Himself forth as the primary subject in this passage, He shows that the Father to be the primary actor. The gift and benefits of life come through Jesus, even as the Father is imparting that life through Him. Jesus is the vine through which the vinedresser gives life to His people.

¹ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 511.

First, we see that the Lord Jesus declared, “*I am* the true vine.” This is the seventh and last of seven formal “I am” statements in John’s Gospel. These seven formal ‘I am’ statements are emphatic descriptions of the person and ministry of the Jesus Christ.”² It is but another assertion of Jesus that He is the great “I AM”, the one true God. They contain the highest and loftiest descriptions of the person of Jesus Christ as eternal God incarnate.

The Lord Jesus declared that He was the “*true vine*”. This is suggestive of a false vine or a vine that failed to provide spiritual life to its members. Our Lord was comparing and contrasting Himself with the physical nation of Israel, which by intimation He declared to be a false vine, that is a vine that had failed to give life to its branches.

The vine is a common metaphor for the nation of Israel in a number of places in the Old Testament record. We might consider these passages, and as we do, let us think about the condition or nature of Israel as a vine.

Psalm 80:8-16.

⁸You have brought a vine out of Egypt;
You have cast out the nations, and planted it.

⁹You prepared room for it,
And caused it to take deep root,
And it filled the land.

¹⁰The hills were covered with its shadow,
And the mighty cedars with its boughs.

¹¹She sent out her boughs to the Sea,
And her branches to the River.

¹²Why have You broken down her hedges,
So that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?

¹³The boar out of the woods uproots it,
And the wild beast of the field devours it.

¹⁴Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;
Look down from heaven and see,
And visit this vine

¹⁵And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,
And the branch that You made strong for Yourself.

¹⁶It is burned with fire, it is cut down;
They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.

Isaiah 27:2-6.

In that day sing to her,
“A vineyard of red wine!

³I, the LORD, keep it,
I water it every moment;
Lest any hurt it,
I keep it night and day.

⁴Fury is not in Me.
Who would set briars and thorns
Against Me in battle?
I would go through them,

² Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 650.

I would burn them together.
⁵Or let him take hold of My strength,
That he may make peace with Me;
And he shall make peace with Me.”

⁶Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob;
Israel shall blossom and bud,
And fill the face of the world with fruit.

Jeremiah 2:21-22.

²¹Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality.
How then have you turned before Me
Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?
²²For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap,
Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,” says the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 15:1-8.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ²“Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? ³Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg from it to hang any vessel on? ⁴Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work? ⁵Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for any work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?

⁶“Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ⁷and I will set My face against them. They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I set My face against them. ⁸Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have persisted in unfaithfulness,’ says the Lord GOD.”

Ezekiel 19:10-14.

¹⁰“Your mother was like a vine in your bloodline,
Planted by the waters,
Fruitful and full of branches
Because of many waters.
¹¹She had strong branches for scepters of rulers.
She towered in stature above the thick branches,
And was seen in her height amid the dense foliage.
¹²But she was plucked up in fury,
She was cast down to the ground,
And the east wind dried her fruit.
Her strong branches were broken and withered;
The fire consumed them.
¹³And now she is planted in the wilderness,
In a dry and thirsty land.
¹⁴Fire has come out from a rod of her branches
And devoured her fruit,
So that she has no strong branch—a scepter for ruling.’ ”

In each of these passages in which the metaphor of the vine is used for the nation of Israel there is one display the corruption and failure of the nation to produce what God had desired and designed for His people. It also illustrates that the nation was under the judgment of God and that it had warranted His wrath upon it. In the Ezekiel 15 passage above, Israel is shown to be as a vine that deserves to be burned. In Ezekiel 19 Israel the vine, which was at one time fruitful, was in need of being torn up by the roots and thrown into the fire.

But in contrast to Israel of the Old Testament as the corrupt, unfruitful vine, Jesus declared, “I am the true vine.”

This title describes the *quality* of the true vine, how Jesus accomplished everything the Israel-vine was unable to do: He thrives and bears fruit. The qualification of “true” is intended to contrast forcefully Jesus with Israel (cf. 10:11). Jesus is the fulfillment of the Israel-vine and the one who completes its mission... The Gospel of John has already taken great care to describe how Jesus fulfils and replaces the old covenant persons and institutions of the temple (e.g. ch. 2), sacred places/mountains (e.g. ch. 4), Moses (ch. 5), and the Jewish feasts (e.g. ch. 6); as the true vine Jesus also supersedes Israel as the center and source of God’s people. The *places* (i.e. the land, Jerusalem, temple, altar) and the *people* (Israel, Jewish bloodlines, priestly heritage) have been fulfilled and replaced by the *one person*: Jesus Christ.³

Or as another put it, “under the image of the vine, Israel gives way to Jesus.”⁴

After Jesus declared Himself to be the true vine, He further stated in verse 1, “***and My Father is the vinedresser.***” God the Father superintends all that is accomplished through Jesus Christ. It was in the Father’s purpose and work that Jesus Christ as the true vine replace the corrupt vine of Israel that had failed to bring forth its fruit in season onto Him.

Lightfoot says, “Hitherto Israel had been the vine, into which every one that would worship the true God must be grafted. But from henceforth they were to be planted into the profession of Christ.”⁵

Our Lord had once given a parable to demonstrate the failure of Israel as a fig tree that had been planted in a vineyard which was intended to bring forth fruit unto God. In Luke 13:6-10 we read His words:

⁶He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ ⁸But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’ ”

Not only was the physical nation of Israel destroyed for its failure to bring forth fruit into God, but Jesus Christ replaced Israel as the true vine that would bring forth fruit unto God. But it was all God’s doing. Again, Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”

Our Lord next declared in **verse 2**, “***Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.***” Here our Lord was describing the work of His Father as the Husbandman, the Vinedresser. He is the one who assures that true branches are in vital connection with His vine, the Lord Jesus, and that they are bearing fruit.

All true branches of this true vine will bear fruit. What is meant by “fruit”? Actually the meaning of “fruit” is not specifically found in these verses. We may assume, however, that it speaks of the kind of life that should characterize true disciples of Jesus Christ. As one wrote, “The ‘fruit’ is not defined here. But we need not doubt that qualities of Christian character are in mind as elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt.

³ Ibid, p. 651.

⁴ Carson, **John**, p. 510.

⁵ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 111.

3:8; 7:20; Rom. 6:22; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11).”⁶ Some have argued that to bring forth fruit is to evangelize, to lead others to become Christians. But the fruit here is not a metaphor of new Christians. Here the branches are the Christians, not the fruit.

The metaphor of fruit with regard to the Christian life is a common one found in the New Testament. Consider these passages: The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22 and 23, “But *the fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Hebrews 12:11 reads, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable *fruit of righteousness* to those who have been trained by it.” And Philippians 1:9-11 record, “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with *the fruit of righteousness* that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Fruit speaks of the holy life that should characterize the disciple of Jesus Christ. It speaks of lives of righteousness. Later in the passage we read that bearing fruit is linked with keeping God’s commandments. **R. C. Sproul** (1939-2017) commented on this matter this way:

What is the fruit Jesus is concerned to see in our lives? There has been much debate about that. Some believe that the only fruit Jesus is concerned about is people coming to saving faith in Him. In other words, “bearing fruit” means leading people to Christ. Others argue that the fruit is obedience to the law of God. Certainly both of these aspects are important, and both are involved in bearing fruit, but the central emphasis on fruit in the New Testament has to do with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is the fruit of a changed life, a changed character, a character that is strengthened and nurtured by the source of holiness, Christ Himself.⁷

Jesus said of the work of His Father, the Vinedresser: “*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.*” Not only do the fruitful branches need God’s attention, but so do those branches that do not bear fruit. God the Father takes them away. Judas Iscariot could be counted as one of these. Only fruit-bearing branches are allowed to be in Christ.

There is a play on words before us in our Lord’s words. Jesus said, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He *takes away* [αἶρει; (*airie*)] and every branch that bears fruit He *prunes* [καθαίρει, (*katharie*)] that it may bear more fruit.” The first word, αἶρει; (*airie*), means to “cut off.” The second word, καθαίρει, (*katharie*) is the Greek word from which we get the English word, *catharsis*, which means a *cleansing*.

Now there have been many proposals of various doctrines based on some of the details of parables such as this one. Arminians tend to look on this verse as teaching that true Christians, that is, true branches in Christ, can be removed by the Father. In other words, they say that this teaches that true believers can lose their salvation. But what is the point of our Lord’s statement? He is indicating that His Father will not allow a non-fruit bearing branch to be joined to His vine, to Jesus Christ. All who are in vital union with Jesus Christ will be fruit bearing. Here are the words of **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900):

The true meaning of the verse I believe to be this: “My Father deals with My mystical body (the church) just as the vine-dresser deals with the vine and its branches. He will no more allow any of My members to be fruitless and graceless, than a vine-dresser will allow barren branches to grow on the vine. My Father will take care that all who are in Me give proof of their union by their fruitful lives and conversation. He will not tolerate for a moment such an inconsistent being as an unfruitful believer, if such a being could be found. In a word, fruitfulness is the great test of being one of My disciples; and he that is not fruitful is not a branch of the true vine.”⁸

⁶ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 670.

⁷ R. C. Sproul, **John**, St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary (Reformation Trust, 2009), p. 286.

⁸ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 112.

The Father is principally concerned that the disciples of Jesus Christ are fruit bearing. He takes steps to do so. A non-fruit bearing branch is no Christian, although he may appear to be one. He is a hypocrite, whose life bears no witness (fruit) that he is a true branch vitally connected to Jesus, the vine.

But not only does the Father remove unfruitful branches, for we read that “*every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*” This speaks of the ongoing work of sanctification that the Father effects in the lives of our Lord’s disciples. Pruning is not necessarily a pleasant process, but being cut and trimmed is a necessary process for a fruit bearing vine. **J. C. Philpot** (1802-1869) wrote of this in his lengthy written sermon, *Winter Afore (before) the Harvest, or a Soul’s Growth in Grace*. It was based on the passage of **Isaiah 18:5** and **6**, which reads,

“For afore (before) the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them.”

Philpot began his message speaking of the wonderful joys of the early Christian experience. Having come forth from perhaps deep conviction of sin, the new believer in Christ experiences a profound uplifting sense of pardon, of being brought into familiar relationship with the Lord. He has new life, which is characterized by new desires and delights, of new companions and new experiences of peace and comfort. But then Philpot addressed what often follows this early period of great joy and grace as a Christian. It is one of doubt and difficulty, of failure and frustration. Philpot wrote,

Who would not think this happy soul near to heaven, when it seems to be thus on the very borders of it? But it may be near it, and yet not enter into it; as the children of Israel were very near the land of Canaan forty years before they took possession of it; forty years of weary wandering in the wilderness, after their first pitching in Kadesh (Num. 13:26), which was in the uttermost of the border of Edom (Num. 20:16), and therefore close to the Holy Land. There are lessons to be learnt, of which the soul at present knows little or nothing. There is an experience to be passed through, little, little dreamt of; a road to be travelled, as yet but little, little known. Harvest does not succeed summer in the kingdom of grace, as in the kingdom of nature. “Afore (before) the harvest” another season comes. A long and dreary winter intervenes, and with winter comes the pruning knife of the heavenly Husbandman, who purgeth the vine, “that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). “For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches.” But why should this wintry season be necessary? What need of this sharp and severe discipline? Why should not the soul go on as it has begun? Why should it not proceed from strength to strength, and increase in faith, hope, and love, until its peace should be as a river, and its righteousness as the waves of the sea? (Isa. 48:18).

Why is this? What is God doing? Here he set forth the need for God’s pruning activity in this stage of life of the Christian.

A little spiritual insight, then, into the human heart may explain the reason why this severe discipline is needful, and unravel this mystery. Together with the spiritual graces that had first budded, and afterwards, under the warm beams of the sun, burst forth into flower, there had shot unperceived an *undergrowth* of self-righteousness and spiritual pride.

Counterfeits, too, and imitations of divine operations had sprung up, as the offspring of a deceitful heart, or as delusions of satan transformed into an angel of light. Side by side with spiritual trust, fleshly presumption had imperceptibly crept up. Under the shadow of divine hope, vain confidence had put forth its rank shoots. Natural belief had grown rapidly up with spiritual faith, fleshly ardour with heavenly zeal, universal charity with divine love, and the knowledge that puffeth up the head with the

grace that humbleth the heart. Above all things, pride, “accursed pride, that spirit by God abhorred”, was taking occasion by the very grace of God to feed itself to the full...

But beside these more obvious and glaring evils, we may remark that self was as yet little known (to that Christian), the deep recesses of a desperately wicked heart little fathomed, the helplessness, beggary and bankruptcy of the creature little felt. The unspeakable value, therefore, of Christ’s blood, the breadths, lengths, depths and heights of distinguishing love, the riches of the goodness, forbearance and longsuffering of God, the depths of misery and degradation to which the Redeemer stooped to pluck His chosen from death and hell—all these divine mysteries, in the experience of which the very marrow of vital godliness consists, were little known and less prized. Judging from my own experience, I believe there is at this time an indistinctness, a dimness, a haziness in the views we have of Christ. Though the soul loves and cleaves to Him with purpose of heart, yet it does not see nor feel the depth of the malady, and therefore not the height of the remedy. It has not yet been plunged into the ditch, till its own clothes abhor it (Job 9:31), nor cast into “deep mire where there is no standing” (Psa. 69:2). The fountains of the great deep of the human heart have not yet been broken up; the exceeding sinfulness of sin has not yet been fully manifested; the desperate enmity and rebellion of a fallen nature have not yet been thoroughly discovered; nor the wounds, bruises and putrefying sores of inward corruption been experimentally laid bare. And thus, as the knowledge of salvation can only keep pace with the knowledge of sin, Christ is as yet but half a Saviour...

A lesson, therefore, is to be taught which the soul can learn in no other way. Books here are useless, Christian friends of little value, ministers ineffectual, and the letter of the Word insufficient. A certain experience must be wrought in the soul, a peculiar knowledge be communicated, a particular secret be revealed, and all this must be done in a way for which no other can be substituted. This, then, is the reason why winter comes before harvest, and why “the sprigs are cut off with pruning hooks, and the branches taken and cut down.”

The discipline thus exercised by the heavenly Husbandman consists of two distinct parts; 1. The first is that which is immediately and peculiarly exercised by Himself: “**He** will cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches.” 2. The second is that which He leaves to be accomplished by other agents. “They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth; and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them.”

All of this experience is expressed in the few words of our Lord, “***and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.***”

But then the Lord Jesus declared to His disciples their standing before Him. **Verse 3** records, “***You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.***” What is meant by “clean” in this passage? Here to be clean speaks of having salvation and of being in a vital, living relationship with the Lord. It had “already” occurred. They were “clean.” It indicates that they were living branches in Him, who had received and were receiving spiritual life through Him.

What had brought about their blessed condition? Jesus said, “You are already clean ***because of the word which I have spoken to you.***” The “word” that Jesus had spoken to them had resulted in them having become “clean.” His Word had brought them to saving faith, cleansing them from the guilt and the pollution of sin. They were no longer filthy and defiled, but they were now clean, and dwelling in Him. His Word had accomplished in them this work of saving grace. “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (Jam. 1:18). Here “His Word” should be understood as the totality of His instruction and His example before them that had led them to true faith in Him.

In this case “the word” must imply the entirety of His message; the term could even have been translated as “message.” Jesus is the Word, and His work has been to make God known (1:18). This has been done for His disciples.⁹

⁹ Klink, p. 652.

Jesus then gave them instruction in **verse 4**: “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.*” The word, “abide” may be simply translated as “remain.” Jesus was telling His disciples, “Remain in Me.” It may also carry the idea of “dwell” or “stay” or “continue to live.” How is this done? To abide in Him is to be continually connected to Him in faith and fellowship. It is to continue in faith in Him, relying upon Him for our life, looking to Him as the source and the strength of our life in Him.

The term (i.e. abide) has become a technical term in the Gospel (5:38; 6:56; 8:31; 12:36; 14:10, 17, 25), though its meaning and function is fully established in this pericope. Wallace suggests that the aorist imperative is a constantive (a solemn command), which stresses the urgency of the act: “It is as if the author says, ‘Make this your top priority.’” This command serves to introduce the primary category by which the Christian relates and communes with God. This is the foundational manner of Christian existence; this is the nature of salvation. It is what the church has long described and defined by several theological terms, perhaps primarily “union with Christ.”¹⁰

Thomas Boston (1676-1732) wrote of “The Mystical Union Between Christ and Believers”, which he based upon verse 5 in our passage. He prefaced his words on this subject by stating “I proceed to speak of the change made in them, in their union with the Lord Jesus Christ, in opposition to their mutual relative state, the state of misery.” He went on to write of the true believer’s union with Christ in the following ways:

- 1. It is a spiritual union.** Man and wife, by their marriage union, become one flesh; Christ and true believers, by this union, become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).
- 2. It is a real union.** “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His body” (Eph. 5:30).
- 3. It is a most close and intimate union.** Believers, regenerate persons, who believe in Him, and rely on Him, have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).
- 4. Though it is not a mere legal union, yet it is a union supported by law.** Christ as the surety, and Christians as the principle debtors, are one in the eye of the law.
- 5. It is an in dissolute union.** Once in Christ, ever in Him. Having taken up habitation in the heart, He never removes (leaves).
- 6. It is a mysterious union.** The gospel is a doctrine of mysteries. It discovers (reveals) to us the substantial union of the three persons in one Godhead, 1 John 5:7. This makes saints a mystery to the world; yea, a mystery to themselves.

Boston described them “who are in a state of grace, are ingrafted in, and united to the Lord Jesus Christ. They are taken out of their natural stock, cut off from it; and are now grafted into Christ, as the new stock.”¹¹

We might answer the question, “How is this abiding in Christ done?” or, “How do I know if and when I am abiding in Christ in a right manner?” Let us consider several verses that speak to this matter.

John 5:38. “But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.”

John 6:56. “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

John 8:31. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.’”

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 653.

¹¹ Thomas Boston, **The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston**, vol. 8 (Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), pp. 179-181.

First, to abide in Christ is to have His Word continually before you, reflecting upon it, always believing it, and attempting to apply it to your thinking and living. Second, we would say that to abide in Christ is to have always before you your belief in and dependence upon His life and His death upon His cross as central and foundational to your abiding relationship with Him. You abide in Him when you continue in faith in your relationship characterized by these things.

If a Christian fails to abide in Christ day by day, his spiritual health and vitality will suffer atrophy. His devotion will cease to be as it once was. His desire and delight in Christ will not be as it was formerly. His concern for the things of Christ, for the furtherance of His kingdom and His glory will wane. His burden for the eternal well-being of souls will diminish. His strength and resolve to resist sin will weaken. As he continues to “live” for Christ, but apart from abiding in Christ, he will give forth a struggle here and there, now and then, but nothing will seem to change for the better. He may even become critical toward others he once admired and emulated. In short the life that is in Christ alone begins to fade and grows faint. It is a common action that our Lord takes in such cases to confront that wayward one perhaps through some great trial or calamity, which serves to awaken and restore that one to His favor and fellowship. Life is much more pleasant and peaceful to abide in Him continually and enjoy the spiritual vigor and robust infusion of life that comes from one’s connection with Him.

II. The fruitful life of the one who abides in Christ (15:5-8)

Jesus then went one to say to His disciples these words:

⁵“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:5-8)

With Christ a Christian can do much—“he bears much fruit.” Apart from Christ, even a believer can do nothing—“without Me you can do nothing.”

This is the conclusion and application of the whole parable. So long as we are separate from Him, we bear no fruit that is good and acceptable to God, for we are unable to do anything good.¹²

Here we see that everything we are as Christians, everything that we attempt as Christians, all things that we accomplish as Christians, is due to Christ working in and through us.

In regard of the influential communications from Him to the branches: This is that which is especially meant in this place; believers are compared to branches, Christ to the Vine. As the Vine doth communicate sap and nourishment to the branches, so doth Christ communicate spiritual sap and nourishment to believers. All the churches springs are in Christ. Psalm 87:7, believers have nothing but what comes from Him, believers can do nothing that is good, but by assistance from Him. He is the strength of their strength, the wisdom of their wisdom. God hath put all their stock and portion in His hands. They have their dependence on Him, they have all their supply from Him: This is what is that which is laid down in verse 5 of this chapter, *Without Me, or severed from Me, ye can do nothing.*¹³

The Bible is a book of instruction. It should be our desire and delight to attempt to keep every precept. We pray to our Lord, “Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my

¹² John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XVIII (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 109.

¹³ Ralph Robinson, *Christ All and in All* (London, 1660), p. 186.

whole heart” (Psa. 119:34). But we are in far more need than just instruction to direct us and guide us in the course of faith and obedience. Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing.” We are in need of being in close fellowship with our Savior, for in our connection to Him is spiritual life received, developed, and enriched.

Paul certainly understood this and proclaimed it. He wrote of himself, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God (2 Cor. 3:5). And our statement of faith affirms this reality in the article on the Christian’s good works. Of Christians it is said:

Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ; and that they may be enabled thereunto, besides the graces they have already received, there is necessary an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will and to do of his good pleasure; yet they are not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit, but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them. (John 15:4f; 2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 2:12f; Heb. 6:11f; Isa. 64:7).¹⁴

The apostle Paul exhorted Christians to resort to Jesus Christ for power to live. We read in Romans 13:14, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.” **Charles Spurgeon** wrote,

“Put you on the Lord Jesus Christ,” that is, find in Jesus your *strength*. Although you are saved and are quickened by the Holy Spirit so as to be a living child of the living God, yet you have no strength for heavenly duty except as you receive it from above. Go to Jesus for power! I charge you, never say, “I shall do the right because I have resolved to do it. I am a man of strong mind. I am determined to resist this evil and I know I shall not yield. I have made up my mind and there is no fear of my turning aside.” Brother, if you rely upon *yourself* in that way, you will soon prove to be a broken reed. ***Failure follows at the heel of self-confidence.*** “Put you on the Lord Jesus Christ.” I charge you, do not rely upon what you have acquired in the past. Say not in your heart, “I am a man of experience and therefore I can resist temptation which would crush the younger and greener folk. I have now spent so many years in persistent well-doing that I may reckon myself out of danger. Is it likely that I should ever be led astray?” O Sir, it is *more* than likely! It is a fact already! ***The moment that a man declares he cannot fall, he has already fallen from sobriety and humility!*** Your head is turned, my Brother, or you would not talk of your inward perfection! And when the head turns, the feet are not very safe. Inward conceit is the mother of open sin. Make ***Christ*** your strength and not yourself—nor your acquirements or experiences. “Put you on the Lord Jesus Christ” day by day and ***make not the rags of yesterday to be the raiment of the future.*** Get fresh Grace. Say with David, “All my fresh springs are in You.” Get all your power for holiness and usefulness from Jesus and from Him alone. “Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” Rely not on resolves, pledges, methods, prayers. Lean on Jesus, only, as the strength of your life.

To put on the Lord Jesus Christ is to humbly acknowledge before Him, “Lord, unless you guide me and help me in this, I’m going to mess it up. I need your strength, and I am now trusting You to do for me and in me that of which I am incapable.”

The Lord then gave this warning in **verse 6**, “***If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.***” Every true Christian does indeed abide in Christ. Those who do not and are “cast out” are no true branches of the vine. If one thinks or claims to be a true branch, but bears no fruit that comes forth in every true branch, it is cut off and put into the burn pile.

There was a somewhat similar truth expressed by John the Baptist. But whereas our Lord spoke here about a vine and its branches, John the Baptist proclaimed a message regarding fruitless trees. But the end of

¹⁴ **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, Article 16, paragraph 3.

the fruitless branches of the vine and the fruitless trees was the same, in that they were thrown into the fire. Here is Matthew's account of the ministry of John the Baptist:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"...

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. ¹⁰And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. ***Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.***

Whereas John declared that every fruitless tree would be thrown into the fire (Matt. 3:10), the Lord Jesus taught that every branch that did not bear fruit would be thrown into the fire (John 15:6).

But on the other hand, our Lord promised His people in **verse 7**, "***If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.***" The asking according to our desire is to be understood as desiring to bring forth fruit in one's life. He abundantly grants this request from His own, those who abide in Him.

And then the passage concludes with this word in **verse 8**. "***By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.***" Only true disciples are true Christians. They show forth that they are Christ's disciples by bearing fruit of righteousness that Christ produces in them through their abiding attachment to Him. God is greatly glorified by the fruit that He produces in the lives of His people.

"When Christ who is your life appears,
then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:4)
