

I AM THE TRUE VINE

JOHN 15:1-8



UNDERSTANDING HIS WORD

1. This is the last of the “I Am” sayings of Christ in John’s Gospel. This self-declaration has an additional predicate (*...and my Father is the gardener*). Since Christ’s role in the redemption narrative is that of the mediator, who speaks God’s word and does His work, this relationship is underscored in this declaration, although the Father is in the background.
2. Jesus is the **true** vine. In the O.T. Israel is frequently portrayed as a vine or a vineyard: *“Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones. Their heart is deceitful, and now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones”* (Hos 10:1 & 2).
See also Isa 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Eze 15:1-5, 17:1-21, 19:10-15; Psa 80:8-18.

In every instance when Israel is depicted in the O.T. as a vine or vineyard, the nation is being judged by God for its corruption, its failure to produce good fruit. Jesus, being the true vine is a deliberate contrast to the failure of Israel to live up to her calling to be fruitful for God.

3. Jesus is the true vine, not the church. Jesus is seen as the representative, the Son of God, Son of Man, who is the sinless One who dies for the sinful. In His resurrection, Christ in union with His redeemed creates a new people who may bring forth fruit for God.
4. There is a word play in the original rendering of 15:2 & 3. *“Cuts off”* meaning “take away, remove, clear away” is part of the word translated “cleanse,” which is commonly used in a religiously sense, but can also mean “clear” (eg. of weeds). God “cuts off” dead branches and cleans off unwanted living shoots (prunes or “cuts clean”). The verb is in a tense that indicates this is what God always does with certainty.
5. The vine is a plant that needs much attention if it is to bear the best fruit. The ground has to be perfectly clean. While it is commonly grown on terraces, it is sometimes trained on trellises. It grows luxuriantly and drastic pruning is necessary. A young vine is not allowed to fruit for the first three years and each year, it is cut drastically back to develop and conserve its life and energy. The vine cannot produce to its full capacity without drastic pruning (Barclay).

6. The wood of the vine is curiously good for nothing. It is too soft for any purpose. God's people bringing offerings of wood to the Temple for altar fires are not to bring the wood of vine. Wood of vine is only good for destruction in bonfires (Barclay).
7. To remain in Jesus (15:4) is more than to continue to believe in Him. It means to continue to "live in association or in union" with Him. The verb is in the aorist tense, signifying "Step into union with me." When we do that, the assurance is that certainly, "I will remain in you." We need grace to "step into union" with Christ, and by grace, He promises to remain in us. The entire relationship is a total dependence on Christ and His grace.
8. Jesus reiterates "*I am the vine*" (15:5) and indicates the purpose of this relationship is to bear fruit. Bearing fruit brings glory to God and is a mark of our discipleship: "*This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples*" (15:8).

In Isa 5:1-7, the fruit God was looking for was "justice and righteousness." In the context of John 15, surpassing all righteous virtues that result from obedience is love: "*If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love...My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you...*" (15:10, 12).

Paul tells us that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control...*" (Gal 5:22 & 23).

9. The point in the analogy of the vine is: "*apart from me you can do nothing*" (15:5c). We have no capacity to continue to remain in Him, nor the ability to bear fruit on our own. And, if bearing fruit brings glory to God, we are totally incapable of honoring God and pleasing Him on our own strength. Not only are we totally dependent on God for our achievements, we are reliant on Him for the very breath of our lives. We depend on His grace for our lives.
10. Unproductive branches of a vine are thrown away, become withered and collected for firewood. It points to the uselessness of the branch that bears no fruit and the Gardener's rejection of the branch.

What we do not use, we lose. The principle lies behind the manna in the wilderness and the benefits of our talents and resources. Hoarding and boarding for our own protection is an affront to the God who emptied heaven's glory. We lay waste the resources that have a short lifespan. We miss opportunities to bring pleasure and glory to God when we keep resources for enriching ourselves beyond our needs.

Lives that do not count for the Kingdom, and a deep sense of dissatisfaction with our lot in life are the curse of lives that end up rejected by God.

11. God's desire is to bring joy to the hearts of His disciples. Obeying Christ will not only glorify God but our *"joy may be complete"* (15:11). One of the ways our joy will be full is when our prayers are answered. Jesus assures, *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you"* (15:7).



APPLYING HIS WORD

1. If apart from Jesus we can do nothing, then we are exhorted to remain in Him. Jesus, on whom we depend, is the **true** vine. He is the dependable God. We can put our entire weight on Him.

2. Jesus enables the branches to bear fruit. Just as the vine provides nourishment for the branches to grow, Christ nurtures and expands our capacity to be people that bring glory to Him.

3. Remaining in Christ is a conscious choice. If it is a priority, our behaviors will follow our convictions. When we relegate disciplines that mark our discipleship to secondary importance, we are making a choice. Consequences follow choices.



THE KNIFE

Annie Johnson Flint

It is the branch that bears the fruit
That feels the knife
To prune it for a larger growth,
A fuller life.

Though every budding thing be lopped,
And every grace
Of swaying tendril, springing leaf,
Be lost a space.

O thou whose life of joy seems reft,
Of beauty shorn;
Whose aspirations lie in dust,
All bruised and torn,

Rejoice, tho' each desire, each dream
Each hope of thine
Shall fall and fade; it is the hand
Of Love Divine

That holds the knife, that cuts and breaks
With tenderest touch,
That thou, whose life has borne some fruit
May'st now bear much.