

JESUS IS THE TRUE VINE

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

Jesus taught the truths of this chapter to His eleven disciples after departing from the Upper Room (14:31). This discourse was given to the eleven in particular, but its application was intended for all believers. Jesus expressed the vital union between Himself and the believer by the figure of a vine. Lest there be misunderstanding, Jesus gave the interpretation of this figure (15:1). This was not a new concept to the Hebrew mind because Israel had been compared to a vine in the Old Testament scriptures (Ps 30:8ff; Isa 5:1-7).

Jesus identified Himself as the true vine in contrast to Israel which had not been true to God. It did not have a true walk with God so it did not have a true witness for Him. God is the husbandman, the vine-dresser, Who cares for the vine and the branches (15:1). The believers are the branches which are to bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit (15:2, 5). Fruitfulness is possible only by abiding in Christ, the vine (15:4). This is done by confessing Jesus as the Son of God (1 Jn 4:15) and by maintaining fellowship with Him (1 Jn 1:3-7). The evidences of abiding in Christ are effective prayer (15:7), fruitful life (15:8), loving obedience (15:9-10), full joy (15:11) and brotherly love (15:12). Please note that true love is holy. It obeys God's commands (15:14), disdains sin and confesses it with deep sorrow when happens.

The disciples were called friends by Jesus rather than servants. Jesus proved this friendship by relating the things He heard from the Father to His disciples. Had the disciples been mere servants, they would not have known nor teachings of Jesus (15:15) or His peace (14:27). Because of this friendship, they were identified with Jesus and could expect to be hated by the unsaved world (15:18ff). This should not be considered abnormal because Jesus was hated first. He had exposed the sin of the world (15:22). These disciples had two certainties to comfort them in their conflicts. First, they were specifically called by Jesus for the purpose of being fruitful (15:16). Second, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to help them (15:26).

I. The Believer's Relationship to Christ — 15:1-11

A. The Savior's Identity — 15:1a

15:1a — The emphasis is on the word "true" which means real or genuine. This is in contrast to Israel's testimony for God. Israel was God's vine, too, but it was not true to Him. It brought forth wild grapes (Isa 5:1-7). It was degenerate (Jer 2:21) and was empty (Hosea 10:1). Israel was supposed to bring forth good fruit, but she had failed.

A brief explanation regarding a vine is appropriate at this point. A vine provides nourishment for its branches. Jesus, the true vine, gives His branches (followers) all the sustenance that they need. The purpose of a vine is not for producing wood, beautiful flowers or large green leaves, but it is for bearing fruit. Jesus is the vine that enables His followers to bear the fruit of souls won for His glory and for the praise of His Father.

B. The Father's Discipline — 15:1b-2

15:1b — "Husbandman" - This person is a vine-dresser. In this case the heavenly Father is the vine-dresser, Who cares for and cleanses the branches (believers), so they will produce more fruit. Purging (cleansing) is done by the Word of God and, if necessary, by chastening. The idea of bearing fruit in John's Gospel is clearly that of bringing souls to salvation in Christ.

15:2 — What does a vine-dresser do with the unfruitful branches in the vine? It depends on how the Greek word, *airo*, is translated. If *airo* is translated "taken away," it means the vine-dresser cuts the branches off from the vine and takes them away. When applied to the followers of Jesus, these branches are those who profess to be Christians, but they do not personally know Christ. They may appear to be "in" Christ because they belong to a church, but they do not have a spiritual union in Christ (cf. Mt 7:21-23). So God cuts them off from the Vine. He may do it through persecution or tribulation (cf. Mt 13:21-22). However, James Boice translates *airo* to mean "taken up," which is a more common translation in the New Testament. In this scenario, the vine-dresser does not take away unfruitful branches, but he takes up these branches that are lying on the ground and supports them so they can receive light and become fruitful. The purpose of his parable is to show how God makes believers fruitful, not how He removes unbelievers from His "vineyard." He lifts up believers in devotion to Himself and to His Son by His Word so they can become fruitful (The Gospel of John, J. M. Boice, vol. 4, 227ff).

Now the vine-dresser cleanses, purges, the fruitful branches to make them more fruitful. He cleanses the branch of dirt, insects and diseases to keep it healthy. God cleanses the believer of vexing sins, bad habits, useless activities and whatever keeps him or her from witnessing and bringing sinners to Jesus Christ for salvation. God's purpose of pruning a believer is to produce more fruit from his life. When "fruit" is used in the Gospel of John it refers to the fruit as souls that are saved (Jn 4:36; 12:24; 15:16). In a secondary sense fruit may apply to other virtues of believer's life (cf. Gal 5:22-23; Heb 12:11; 2 Pet 1:5-8), but these virtues are to enable a believer to bring souls to salvation in Jesus Christ.

C. The Believer's Opportunities — 15:3-11

15:3 — "Clean" - The believer is cleansed of corrupting friends and sinful influences in his or her life through the Word of God (cf. Ps 119:9; Eph 5:26; Jn 13:10). His Word must be obeyed with love and devotion to Him. God also cleanses believers that are slow to repent by chastening them. All believers need the chastening hand of God from time to time. One who is not chastened is not truly a child of God (cf. Heb 12:8).

15:4-5 — "Abide in Me" - Christians are commanded to abide in Christ. If they do, Christ will abide in them so they can bear fruit. If a Christian does not abide in Christ, he or she does not cease to be a Christian, but simply cannot bear fruit. So what does it mean to abide in Christ? A Christian must be in close fellowship with Him. A branch cannot produce fruit unless it is receiving nourishment from the vine, so a believer must draw close to Christ to receive nourishment from Him. This is done by talking to Him in prayer and by listening to Him through His Word. It is Christ and Christ alone that enables a believer to produce fruit (cf. 2 Cor 3:5; Phil 4:13). This is the power and blessing of abiding in Christ

15:6 — "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch" - There are many interpretations given for this verse. Here are three basic interpretations. (1) Some believe it refers to a Christian that ceases to follow Christ and loses His salvation. As a result, he or she is cast forth as an unbeliever. This interpretation goes against many Scriptures that teach a true believer cannot lose His salvation (Jn 3:16, 36; 5:24; 10:27-29; Phil 1:6; 1 Jn 5:11-13). (2) Others believe it refers to a professing believer that has never truly received Christ as Savior. Judas is an example of such a person. This position was considered in v. 2. (3) A final view that is given by James Boice. He believes the works of a Christian will be burned up if he does not abide in fellowship with Christ, but the Christian will still be saved (1 Cor 3:11-15). John 15:1-16 is directed to believers who are commanded to abide in Christ. It is not directed to professing believers who cannot abide in Christ. But true Christians fall into two classes: those that abide in Christ and those that do not abide in

Christ. Those that abide in Christ are able to produce fruit that remains (v.16). Christians that do not abide in Christ cannot produce good fruit (v. 5).

Now consider what verse 6 says that indicates what is burned up. Notice the singulars and plurals in this verse and the two things that are cast forth. "If a man (singular) abides not in Me, he (singular) is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them (plural) and cast them (plural) into the fire, and they (plural) are burned." The man as a branch is cast forth, but no fire is mentioned. However, the man is withered (a wasted life). Then men gather them and cast them in to the fire, and they are burned. The Greek text does not say the branches are gathered and burned. That is an assumption that some translators make, but it is not what the text says. So it could refer to the works of the man that are burned. Lot is an example of this kind of believers (2 Pet 2:7-8). He was saved, but his works were burned up in the destruction of Sodom. This view agrees with the works of careless believers being burned up in 1 Cor 3:15, but they are saved from the fire.

15:7 — An abiding Christian loves Jesus and keeps His commandments. Compare this verse with John 14:15. The believer that abides in Jesus loves Him (14:15a) and the believer that has Jesus' words abiding in him or her obeys His commandments (14:15b). This is how we can know God's will and can have confidence that He hears us and will give us what we need to do His work (cf. 1 Jn 5:14-15).

15:8 — An obedient Christian will be concerned about glorifying the Father and, thus will seek to bear "much" fruit (cf. Mt 5:16).

15:9 — The command of Christ is to continue in His love. His love is unchanging (Heb 13:8); abundant (Eph 3:19); and comforting (1 Jn 4:18). When a believer abides in His love, he will be changed by His love.

15:10 — The life of a Christian is to be one of constant obedience to Christ. This is the basis for true love and fellowship with Christ.

15:11 — Joy is a result of obedience. This joy is full. It has been described as peace bubbling over.

II. The Believer's Relationship to Each Other and to Jesus — 15:12-17

A. Love Is Commanded — 15:12

15:12 — Christians are to love one another with a divine love. This is not an option, but an obligation. Christians are to love one another as Christ loved them. This is divine love. Divine love shows genuine concern (cf. Rom 13:10; 1 Cor 13). Divine love is sacrificial. Jesus was the greatest example in giving.

B. Love Is Demonstrated — 15:13

15:13 — Jesus demonstrated divine love by laying down His life for others. This is the extent to which a believer is to love another believer (1 Jn 3:16). (Note: Jesus had not yet laid down His life, but would do so in a few hours.)

C. Love is Explained — 15:14-17

15:14 — Love is for friends, but friendship is a two-sided relationship. Christ died for us because He loved us as His friends. However, as His friends, we have the obligation to obey Him or our friendship is meaningless. This two-way relationship with Christ must be maintained in our love relationships with others.

15:15 — Love among friends is intimate. No secrets are withheld. Open exchanges of vital information are shared.

15:16 — Love among friends is full of trust for one another. Christ showed His love by entrusting His friends with the Gospel. He chose them and ordained or appointed them, to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). He commanded them to GO and bring forth fruit. This is talking about going into all the world to preach the Gospel so souls can be brought to Jesus Christ for salvation. He was not talking about the fruit of the Spirit. He promised them that they would bear fruit and it would remain faithful to Him. He also provided a means for helping them accomplish their work by giving them the privilege of prayer. They could ask for anything they needed to get the job done and He would give it to them.

15:17 — After giving them a demonstration and an explanation of love from His own life, He commanded them once again to love one another (cf. v. 12).

III. The Believer's Relationship to the World — 15:18-25

A. Characterized — 15:18-20

15:18-19 — Negatively, the world will hate the believer because it hated Christ first. The believer should expect to suffer for Christ's sake (Phil 1:29). Furthermore, it will hate the Christian because he is no longer a part of the world system. Therefore, he can expect to be persecuted by the world (2 Tim 3:12).

15:20 — Positively, some will be won by the believer's witness. Like some listened to Christ and received Him, so some will listen to Christians and receive their message.

B. Clarified — 15:21-25

15:21 — The world's hatred is due to their unbelief in God's plan of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 2:14).

15:22 — Their unbelief was exposed by Christ and it brought condemnation upon them.

15:23 — The world's hatred toward Christ is rebellion against God.

15:24-25 — Jesus' works were greater than those done by any other, but the hearts of the people were rebellious. This was a fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Ps 35:19; 69:4) - they hated Him without a cause. This will also be the experience of true Christians (1 Pet 4:13-16).

IV. The Believer's Relationship to the Holy Spirit — 15:26-27

15:26 — As a result of all the persecution and hatred the world would heap upon Christians, Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit to help and comfort them in their trials. He is the "Spirit of truth" and He would enable them to discern the errors of the ungodly and to know the will of God. The Holy Spirit would also testify to them about the truth of Jesus Christ.

15:27 — The disciples were expected to be witnesses of Christ. Not only would the Holy Spirit witness to them about the truth concerning Jesus Christ, but they themselves had been with Him from the beginning and they knew that He truly was the Son of God.