

## The True Vine John 15:1-4

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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. NKJV

This is the last of Jesus I am statements. Let us review them.

### I am the bread of life.

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life.** He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. NKJV

John 6:41 The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "**I am the bread which came down from heaven.**" NKJV

John 6:48 **I am the bread of life.** NKJV

John 6:51 **I am the living bread** which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." NKJV

### I Am the Light of the World

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "**I am the light of the world.** He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." NKJV

### I Am He

John 8:24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that **I am He**, you will die in your sins." NKJV

John 8:28 Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that **I am He**, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. NKJV

John 13:19 Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that **I am He.** NKJV

John 18:5-8 They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus said to them, "**I am He.**" And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. 6 Now when He said to them, "**I am He,**" they drew back and fell to the ground. 7 Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." 8 Jesus answered, "I have told you that **I am He.** Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," NKJV

### I AM

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM.**" NKJV

### I Am the Light of the World

John 9:5 As long as I am in the world, **I am the light of the world.**" NKJV

### I Am the Door of the Sheep

John 10:7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, **I am the door of the sheep**. NKJV

John 10:9 **I am the door**. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. NKJV

### I Am the Good Shepherd

John 10:11 "**I am the good shepherd**. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. NKJV

John 10:14 **I am the good shepherd**; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. NKJV

John 10:36 do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, '**I am the Son of God**'? NKJV

### I Am the Resurrection and the Life

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life**. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. NKJV

### I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me. NKJV

### I Am the True Vine

John 15:1 "**I am the true vine**, and My Father is the vinedresser. NKJV

John 15:5 "**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. NKJV

In each of these Jesus tells us about a characteristic of Himself and His ministry. But in this vine illustration Jesus emphasis is really on His followers and their connection to Him the true vine.

This is a highly disputed passage as we will see. But the basic things Jesus wants us to know are very straightforward.

- I. I am the true vine.
  - A. The idea of the Old Testament is that Israel was the vine.
    1. In Isaiah 5 is the well know passage in which God tells the story of His beloved vineyard, which was Israel.
    2. There are various other passages that use similar language.
  - B. But now Jesus has changed that.
    1. He claims that He is the TRUE vine.
    2. There is a definite break with Judaism implied here that the disciples will not fully grasp for years to come.
    3. Jesus had hinted at this in other places like when He said that you do not

put new wine in old wine skins.

4. He had not come to bring revival to Judaism but to start something new based on Himself.

C. He is the true vine.

1. This implies that there are other vines that are not true but claim to be.

II. My Father is the vinedresser

A. He is the owner-vinedresser, that is the idea.

1. We must understand that this is figurative language.
  - a. Figurative language is meant to teach us something with an illustration.
  - b. The problem that Bible students often have is to try to read too much in the illustration.
  - c. J.C Ryle tells us, "These verses, we must carefully remember, contain a parable. In interpreting it we must not forget the great rule which applies to all Christ's parables. The general lesson of each parable is the main thing to be noticed. The minor details must not be tortured and pressed to an excess, in order to extract a meaning from them. The mistakes into which Christians have fallen by neglecting this rule, are neither few nor small."
2. As the owner-vinedresser the Father works the vineyard to have it produce the most fruit possible.
3. Every farmer understands this principle.
  - a. They put on this mineral, and that chemical. They buy what they consider the best seed, and why.
  - b. It is so that the crop will be as fruitful as possible.

B. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away

1. Now in a vineyard the vine must be trimmed to remove the dead wood.
2. Those branches that no longer produce are simply trimmed back so that new shoots will be produced.
3. What are the theological problems here.
  - a. Is Jesus saying that if we become unfruitful that we lose our salvation.
  - b. Now that might be true if our salvation ever did depend on ourselves.

- c. More likely Jesus is referring only to believers as it seems the branches were real branches but have lost their fruitfulness.
- d. J. Vernon McGee put it this way.
  - (1) “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” He wants fruit in our lives. If a branch does not bear fruit, how does He take it away? One of the ways He removes it is by taking such a person away from the place of fruit-bearing. I know many who have been set aside today because they were no longer effective for God. There are ministers like that and there are lay people like that. Removing such a branch does not mean they lose their salvation, but they are taken away from the place of fruit-bearing.
  - (2) Sometimes this removing from the place of fruit-bearing is by death, physical death. I believe this is what John means in 1 John 5:16 when he says that there is a sin unto death. A Christian can go on sinning until God will remove him from the place of fruit-bearing by death. Ananias and Sapphira were removed by death from the early church, which was a holy church, a fruit-bearing church. These two liars could not stay in that church. I’m afraid they would be very comfortable in some of our churches today, but God would not permit them to remain in the early church.

C. And every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit

- 1. The word translated prune means to cleanse.
- 2. The idea is that those who are fruitful, God continues to cleanse them through the word of God to make them more pure.

III. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

A. The Bible often speaks of the cleansing power of the word of God.

- 1. John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. NKJV
- 2. Eph 5:26-27 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. NKJV
- 3. 1 Peter 1:22-23 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

NKJV

- IV. Abide in Me, and I in you.
  - A. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
  - B. We will talk more about this next week.

John 15:1

By a figure familiar to Jewish ears (Isa 5:1-7; Ezek 15:1; etc.) Jesus here beautifully sets forth the spiritual Oneness of Himself and His people, and His relation to them as the Source of all their spiritual life and fruitfulness.

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John 15:1

The vine yields proper juice and nourishment to all the branches, whether these are large or small. All the nourishment of each branch and tendril passes through the main stalk, or the vine, that springs from the earth. So Jesus is the source of all real strength and grace to his disciples. He is their leader and teacher, and imparts to them, as they need, grace and strength to bear the fruits of holiness.

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John 15:2

It is a union formed by believing on him; resulting from our feeling our dependence on him and our need of him; from embracing him as our Saviour, Redeemer, and Friend. We become united to him in all our interests, and have common feelings, common desires, and a common destiny with him. We seek the same objects, are willing to encounter the same trials, contempt, persecution, and want, and are desirous that his God shall be ours, and his eternal abode ours. It is a union of friendship, of love, and of dependence; a union of weakness with strength; of imperfection with perfection; of a dying nature with a living Saviour; of a lost sinner with an unchanging Friend and Redeemer.

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John 15:2

[He taketh away] The vine-dresser cuts it off. God removes such in various ways:

1. by the discipline of the church.

2. by suffering them to fall into temptation.

3. by persecution and tribulation, by the deceitfulness of riches, and by the cares of the world (Matt 13:21-22): by suffering the man to be placed in such circumstances as Judas, Achan, and Ananias were such as to show what they were, to bring their characters fairly out, and to let it be seen that they had no true love to God.

4. by death, for God has power thus at any moment to remove unprofitable branches from the church.

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John 15:2

The words of another parable will sufficiently answer that question: "The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (see the notes at Mark 4:19). True, that is said of such hearers of the word as "bring no fruit to perfection" at all.

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John 15:2

As a vineyard is worthless unless it bears fruit that may promote the happiness or subsistence of man, so the Christian principle would be worthless unless Christians should live so that others may be made holy and happy by their example and labors, and so that the world may be brought to the cross of the Saviour.

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John 15:2

He does it by taking away what opposes their usefulness, however much they may be attached to it, or however painful to part with it; as a vine-dresser will often feel himself compelled to lop off a branch that is large, apparently thrifty, and handsome, but which bears no fruit, and which

shades or injures those which do. So God often takes away the property of his people, their children, or other idols. He removes the objects which bind their affections, and which render them inactive. He takes away the things around man, as he did the valued gourds of Jonah (Jonah 4:5-11), so that he may feel his dependence, and live more to the honor of God, and bring forth more proof of humble and active piety.

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These verses, we must carefully remember, contain a parable. In interpreting it we must not forget the great rule which applies to all Christ's parables. The general lesson of each parable is the main thing to be noticed. The minor details must not be tortured and pressed to an excess, in order to extract a meaning from them. The mistakes into which Christians have fallen by neglecting this rule, are neither few nor small.

We are meant to learn first, from these verses, that the union between Christ and believers is very close. He is "the Vine," and they are "the branches."

We are meant to learn, secondly, from these verses, that there are false Christians as well as true ones. There are "branches in the vine" which appear to be joined to the parent stem, and yet bear no fruit. There are men and women who appear to be members of Christ, and yet will prove finally to have

We are meant to learn, thirdly, from these verses, that the fruits of the Spirit are the only satisfactory evidence of a man being a true Christian. The disciple that "abides in Christ," like a branch abiding in the vine, will always bear fruit had no vital union with Him. JC Ryle

Following from J. Vernon McGee

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].

?In me,? that is, in Christ, is what it means to be saved. There are tremendous words like propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption that cover particular phases of salvation, but the entire spectrum of salvation is in the phrase ?in Christ.? There are only two groups of people:

those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ. How do you get "in Christ"? By the new birth. When you trust Christ as Savior, you become a child of God through faith. You are born again by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit does something else: He not only indwells you, but He also baptizes you. That is what puts every believer into the body of Christ—"every branch in me."

This passage is directed to believers, to those who are already in Christ. Jesus is not talking about how a person gets saved. He is not actually talking about salvation at all in this passage. Rather, He is talking about fruit-bearing, and that is the next word we wish to mark. Fruit is mentioned six times in the first ten verses. We will find as we go further that there are three degrees of fruit-bearing: fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. The whole theme here is fruit-bearing.

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." Where does He take it? He takes it away from the place of fruit-bearing.

Listen how He describes this in verse 6. (We will come to verses 3-5 later.)

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].

"Oh-oh," somebody says, "that sounds as if you lose your salvation." No, remember this passage is not talking about salvation but about fruit-bearing. It is talking about that which is the result of being saved.

First of all, what is the fruit? I do not believe that the fruit mentioned here refers to soul-winning, as so many people seem to think. I believe soul-winning is a by-product but not the fruit itself. The fruit is the fruit of the Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23). This is fruit in the life of the believer. Abiding in Christ will produce effectual prayer, perpetual fruit, and celestial joy:

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].

That is prayer effectual.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples [John 15:8].

This is fruit perpetual.

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full [John 15:11].

That is joy celestial.

If a person has such fruit in his life, he will be bringing men into the presence of God by his very life. That, of course, makes soul-winning a by-product.

?Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.? He wants fruit in our lives. If a branch does not bear fruit, how does He take it away? One of the ways He removes it is by taking such a person away from the place of fruit-bearing. I know many who have been set aside today because they were no longer effective for God. There are ministers like that and there are lay people like that. Removing such a branch does not mean they lose their salvation, but they are taken away from the place of fruit-bearing.

Sometimes this removing from the place of fruit-bearing is by death, physical death. I believe this is what John means in 1 John 5:16 when he says that there is a sin unto death. A Christian can go on sinning until God will remove him from the place of fruit-bearing by death. Ananias and Sapphira were removed by death from the early church, which was a holy church, a fruit-bearing church. These two liars could not stay in that church. I'm afraid they would be very comfortable in some of our churches today, but God would not permit them to remain in the early church.

?Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.? The Greek word is kathairo, which means ?to cleanse.? Some people consider the purging to be pruning, and He does that too, but it really means to cleanse.

There is no doubt that the Lord does some pruning. He moves into our lives and takes out those things that offend, and sometimes it hurts. He removes things that are hindering us. I can speak to that subject and confess that it hurts. I think the Lord was pruning me when He permitted me to have a cancer and allowed it to stay in my body. He prunes out that which hinders our bearing fruit.

One of the reasons so many of God's children get hurt by this method of pruning is that they get so far from God, so far out of fellowship. The closer we are to God, the less it will hurt. I can remember playing hookey from school when I was a boy. We left our books at school and took off for the creek and went fishing. Although we didn't catch any fish, we had a lot of fun. We came in about the time school was out to get our books before going home so our parents wouldn't suspect that we had played hookey. The principal of the school figured we would do this, and when we walked into the room, he walked in right after us and said, ?Boys, I'm glad to see you.? We had to go to his office and wait while he got his switches. (We'd been through this before.) One of the fellows with me had been through this many times, and he gave me some of the best advice I've ever had. He said that when the principal started switching, we should move a step closer each time instead of backing off. The closer we were to him the less it would hurt. So the first time he hit me, instead of stepping back, I moved right in close to him, and I got so close I was where his fist was, and he wasn't hurting me at all. I have learned that is really good advice

when the Lord chastens us also. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. His chastening is not a sign that He is against us; He is trying to get fruit out of our lives. We tend to complain and move away from Him, but if we draw close to Him, it won't hurt nearly so much.

However, the "purging" in this verse literally means cleansing. When I was in the Bethlehem area, I saw that in their vineyards they let the grapevines grow on the ground, and they propped them up with a rock. Because the grapes get dirty and pests get on them, they actually go around and wash the grapes before they get ripe. So the Lord comes to our lives; He lifts us up and washes us so that we may bear more fruit. How does He do this?

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you [John 15:3].

"Ye are clean through the word." The purging is accomplished by the Word of God. The cleansing power of the Word of God is a wonderful thing. We hear so much today about modern wash-day miracles, but I've never found them to be as miraculous as the claims made for them. The only true wash-day miracle is the cleansing power of the Word of God. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:22-23). We were born again by the Word of God, washed from our sins. Then in our walk down here we get dirty and need the Word of God to cleanse us continually. That is one reason to study the Bible—to be cleansed. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Ps. 119:9).

There are light views among believers today that you can live any kind of life so long as you are fundamental in your belief of salvation by the grace of God. Believe me, God uses the Word of God to reveal to us when we are not walking according to His will. The real test which reveals whether a person is genuine in his relationship to God is whether he is studying the Word of God and whether he is letting it have its way in his life! God intends for us to be obedient to His Word.

"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Ps. 119:67). "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). My friend, He uses affliction to bring us to the Word of God that you and I might be made serviceable to Him. I don't think that you will ever be clean before God if you don't study the Word of God. I believe that the people who are really dangerous are the ones who are as active as termites in our churches but who are reluctant to study the Word of God. I consider them the most dangerous element against the Word of God and the cause of Christ in this world. My friend, we need to study the Word of God and apply it to our lives.

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 15:4].

We have come to the third word I want you to mark, which is abide. To abide in Christ means constant communion with Him all the time. We have just talked of the cleansing power of the Word of God. That is a part of abiding. We must be cleansed daily. There is a story about Spurgeon who stopped in the middle of the street, removed his hat, and prayed. One of his deacons saw this and asked him about it. Mr. Spurgeon said that a cloud had come between him and his Lord and he wanted to remove it immediately; he had stopped to confess his sinful thought. We need to confess our sins to the Lord to abide in Him, to stay in constant communion with Him.

Also to abide in Him, we are to keep 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.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you [John 15:10, 14].

In our hymn books are songs like "Jesus Is a Friend of Mine" and "There's not a Friend like the Lowly Jesus." Friend, let me say this kindly. There is no lowly Jesus today but a glorified Christ at God's right hand. Calling Jesus a friend of mine is sentimental and really wrong. If I would say that the President of the United States is my friend, I bring him down to my level. If he says that I am his friend, that is wonderful. Listen to what Jesus says. "Ye are my friend, if ye do whatsoever I command you." We don't need all this sentimental trash today. We need some honest heart-searching. Are we doing what Jesus has commanded us to do? Obedience is essential to abiding.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love [John 15:9].

Abiding is a continuing communion. That is the relationship of branch and vine. I have a 72' x 123' ranch here in California on which grow four avocado trees, three orange trees, and one tangerine tree. I have never had to say to the branches that they should abide in the tree or we wouldn't have any fruit. I've never been up in the night to inspect them or come home unexpectedly and found the branches running around away from the tree. They abide and they bear fruit. You think I am being ridiculous. However, many Christians think they can live like the Devil all week and on Saturday night, then come in and serve the Lord on Sunday. I happen to know because I tried that for years. My friend, we must be in constant communion with Him to bear fruit. That means when you wake in the morning, when you are at your desk in the office, when you are driving your car on the streets, you are abiding in constant communion.

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 15:5].

Because we have free will, we can break fellowship with God by allowing sin in our life, by stepping out of the will of God, or by worldliness. He wants us to abide so that we bring forth much fruit. You will notice here that there is a similarity to the parable of the sower. Remember that some of the seed fell on good ground and brought forth thirtyfold—that is fruit. Some of the seed brought forth sixty—that is more fruit. Some of the seed brought forth an hundredfold—that is much fruit. God wants us to bear much fruit.

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].

Let me say again that this is talking about our fruit-bearing, the product of our salvation. It is not talking about how we are to be saved. Paul uses another illustration for this same thing: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (This is talking about the works of the believers, the fruit in the life of a believer. Fire will purify gold and silver and precious stones and draw off the dross. Wood, hay, and stubble will go up in smoke. That is the same as our verse which says the works will be cast into the fire and burned.) "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (1 Cor. 3:11-14). I believe that rewards will be given only for the fruit in our lives—and we don't produce the fruit; He produces the fruit when we abide in Him.

A branch that is not abiding in Christ "is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." This is amplified by 1 Corinthians 3:15: "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." He may get to heaven smelling as if he had been bought at a fire sale, but he will not lose his salvation.

One of the saddest things is that today the average Christian believes that normal Christian living is failure. They think that bearing much fruit is entirely out of the question and are willing to live on a low plane hoping to produce just a little fruit. Remember that the Lord wants us to produce much fruit.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples [John 15:7-8].

This is a marvelous prayer promise, but notice the condition. ?If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you? means to be obedient to Him. Then we will have effectual prayer. The whole purpose of the abiding and of the praying is that the Father may have glory. This eliminates prayer for selfish reasons. The issue is fruit-bearing. God is glorified when we do bear fruit.

McGee, J. Vernon: Thru the Bible Commentary. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981, S. Jn 15:2