

The Vine and the Branches

John 15:1-6

John 15:1-6 - *"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.*

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. 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."

Background Notes

John 15 and 16 contain the second part of our Lord's Upper Room Discourse, or the "Farewell Discourse." The first part of the discourse is found in chapters 13-14.

"I am the Vine" is the seventh of the Lord's "I AM" statements. Suppose you were asked to name all the "I AM" statements, could you come up with them?

1. I am the Bread – John 6
2. I am the Light of the world – John 8 and 9
3. I am the Door – John 10
4. I am the Good Shepherd – John 10
5. I am the Resurrection and the Life – John 11
6. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life – John 14
7. I am the Vine – John 15

In His final teachings with His disciples the Lord introduced a new topic: *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."* This is significant, especially in view of the disciples' background. Throughout the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was likened to a vine. But there was a problem with that vine - it was not producing good fruit. In fact, it was fruitless!

Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 5:1-2: *"Now let me sing to my Well-beloved, a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine [the nation of Israel]. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes."*

Wild grapes! No worthwhile fruit! God desired and expected Israel to bring forth good spiritual fruit, but there was none. Only wild grapes! In Jeremiah 2:21 God addressed Israel: *"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?"*

Now against that Old Testament backdrop the Lord Jesus said, "I am the true Vine." The nation of Israel had turned out to be a false vine, an alien vine, producing only wild and useless fruit. Now the Lord Himself taught that He is the true Vine. He is the Vine, and believers are the branches. The question is, are we **true** branches?

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. Dead wood is removed.

Dead wood must be removed from a vine because it is unproductive, and it may harbor insects and disease. Disease can cause rot to spread in the vine, so dead or diseased wood must be removed. In the parable of the vine and branches, who does the dead and removed wood represent? Basically, there are three different views.

View 1: The dead wood represents true believers who have lost their salvation. Well, that can't be a valid view, because the rest of Scripture dictates against it. Think of our Lord's teaching in John 10:27-28, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*" The doctrine of the eternal security of believers is clearly taught in Scripture, so View 1 is not valid.

View 2: The dead wood represents true believers who are not producing fruit, and only appear to be dead. This may be the proper interpretation. If so, how could believers be "taken away" (v2)? What does it mean that they are "taken away and burned" (v6)? Some commentators believe that they are taken away in death in discipline. An example would be the case of the sinful Christians in 1 Corinthians 11:30: "*For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.*" Some were removed and taken away to Heaven to prevent further sin.

In this view, that which is gathered and burned (v6) is **not the believer himself or herself**, but the **fruitless works** of the believer. In this view, the "fire" (v6) is not the fire of hell, but rather the "testing fire" of 1 Corinthians 3, where the wood, the hay, and the stubble - the believer's worthless works - are burned up at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

View 3: The dead wood represents those who falsely profess to be believers, not true believers. In this view, the branches in the vine represent **all** those who **claim** to be followers of Christ. Some of them are "true possessors," and some are "false professors." The true believers produce fruit. Those who falsely profess to believe don't produce fruit because they are dead and bound for hell.

In this parable, the phrase "*Every branch in Me...*" (v2) is not to be confused with the position of the believer as being "in Christ," a doctrine that is taught in the epistles. There are many nominal Christians (including preachers and ministers)

who **claim** to be branches in the Vine of Christ, but they are not **true** believers. They profess to believe in Christ, but they are not truly "in Christ."

Is it possible that you think you're a branch in the Vine, and you have the appearance of being a true branch in the Vine - but you're only going through the motions, and you're not really a true believer? If you are in that "falsely professing to be a believer" category, you can change your category right now! You can become a true believer if you acknowledge your situation, repent of your sin and turn to Christ as your only means of salvation.

In Matthew 7:20 the Lord Jesus said, *“Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”* In other words, a true believer will produce good fruit. An unbeliever, or one who falsely professes to be a believer, does not produce good fruit. Notice the contrast in verses 5-6: *“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. 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.”*

Notice that it doesn't say, *“If **you** don't abide in Me.”* No. It says *“**anyone** who does not abide in Me.”* In other words, in verse 6 Jesus was speaking to believers about unbelievers. The use of the phrase *“anyone who does not believe”* is another indication that those who falsely profess faith are described in verse 6.

Furthermore, in referring to the disciples, the word *“clean”* in verse 3 is the same word that the Lord used of the disciples in contrast to Judas in John 13:10-11: *“Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.”* Judas, a false believer, would be considered *“unclean,”* whereas the disciples, the true believers, would be *“clean.”* Thus in the context of these farewell discourses, Judas was an example of dead wood. There was no fruit because there was no life in him. He was a false follower of Jesus - and he was removed. Dead wood is removed!

2. Live wood is pruned.

Look at the end of 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.”*

Have you ever seen a vineyard in the spring, after the branches on the vines have been pruned? It has been cut back so far that we might wonder how it could produce any fruit at all! But a good pruning is the secret for a great harvest. The life of the vine can now move into the branches to produce fruit. Spiritually speaking, the more the live branches are pruned, the more fruit they will produce!

Notice three things about the process of pruning:

Pruning point #1: God does the pruning. *“My Father is the vinedresser” (v1).* God cares about His vineyard. He certainly knows everything about us, and He knows exactly where - and how much - we need to be pruned.

Pruning point #2: Pruning primarily refers to cutting off good wood. In the parable, it's live wood and live productive branches that are pruned. There is nothing *“evil”* about what is being trimmed off. In order to produce **more** fruit, the living branches are trimmed. In the same way, as Christians (live branches), we may be producing fruit, but perhaps a lot of our spiritual energies are being siphoned off into areas other than fruit - good things, not evil things. Maybe we spend too much time and energy on our jobs, or careers, or homes, or even healthy recreation.

Well, God may have to do some pruning to help us re-direct our energies! He may have to cut us back. And pruning is not a pleasant process. In fact, pruning hurts - but it's helpful!

About thirty years ago the Lord had to do some pruning in my life. I was playing too much golf! Now golf is not a **bad** thing - it's actually healthy exercise. I'm sure many of you would agree. But we can spend too much time playing golf - and we may need some pruning. Live wood is pruned to produce more good fruit!

Pruning point #3: The primary method of pruning is the Word of God. Verse 3: *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."* We've already mentioned that the word "clean" is the same word that the Lord used of the believing disciples in John 13:10. Well, the word "clean" in John 13:10 is the same word that's translated "prune" in verse 2! So it seems that the thought in verse 3 is that God uses His Word as His **primary means of cleaning us up!** Pruning for our sanctification!

God can use many pruning methods in our lives, but the primary tool He uses to prune us is His Word (Hebrews 4:12). That is why it's so important for us to spend time reading His Word each day. Are you reading the Word of God on a regular basis? Live wood is pruned, and God uses the Word as His pruning tool.

Practical Application

Have you discovered the key for producing "much fruit"?

What is the key to producing lots of fruit? The key is **abiding in Christ!** Verses 4-5: *"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. "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."*

What does "abide in Christ" mean? It means **living** and **walking** with the Lord. It means **obeying** the Lord. It means **depending fully** on the Lord. It means reading and absorbing and living out the teachings of His Word. And it means **submitting** to the Word – God's pruning knife! Abiding in Christ is the key - not for producing just **some** fruit, but for producing **much** fruit!

Have you discovered this key? Are you abiding in Christ as an individual? Are you abiding in Christ as a church, and therefore producing much fruit?

Fully depending on the Lord, obeying the Lord, submitting to His pruning knife - **abiding in Christ is the key to bearing much fruit!**