

# The True Vine – *John 15:1-17*

**Introduction** – Jesus has been instructing His disciples since the Last Supper they shared where He washed their feet (Ch13). Judas has departed. As He teaches, John records that Jesus says, “*Arise, let us go from here*” (14:31). When this Farewell Discourse ends, they will find themselves at the Garden of Gethsemane (Ch18). On that walk, they most likely passed nearby the entrance to the Temple. From Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, east of the city, they would have a great view of the Temple, and Josephus records that there was a large golden vine affixed above the entryway into the Holy Place. Over the years, wealthy Jews had added golden leaves and tendrils, and grape clusters that were as tall as a man. It may have been in that context that Jesus continued His discourse: “*I AM the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...*” (15:1).

**Abiding in the True Vine** (vv1-8) – Jesus is the true vine (the seventh “I AM” statement) and the temple (and all the corrupt practices of the Jewish leaders) is not. The prophets regularly pictured Israel as the vine God was tending. Most of the time however, when Israel was referred to as the vine it is regarding their failure to produce good fruit (i.e. Psalm 80:8-16, Isaiah 5:1-7). Branches that are bearing fruit are pruned and branches that do not are cut away (the Father is a good vinedresser, vv1-2). The only way to bear fruit is for the branch to abide in the vine, and branches that do not abide in Him will be cast out (vv4-6). It is the vine that makes fruit, not the branches, that’s the point. If the branch is abiding in the vine, no one is surprised to see grapes grow. The branch gets the honor of growing the grape that the vine makes. The fruit in the lives of believers is not something they do for the Lord; the fruit is the result of abiding in Christ.

**Remaining in the True Vine** – This passage raises concerns for some that a Christian can lose his/her salvation. If I stop producing fruit, will I be cut out and burned? How do we explain v2 in light of 10:28-29 or Rom 8:35, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*” If He moves in, Christ promises never to move out (Jer 32:40, Jude 24). “*They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof*” – WCF XVII.1-2.

The issue is “who has whom?” If you have Christ, you are not trustworthy. But if Christ has you, He is trustworthy. He loses no one.

**Nevertheless** – The Temple/Vine is right before them, and it is going to be cut away. The judgment Israel had already experienced in the siege and destruction under Nebuchadnezzar was a warning. And Christians should look to the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD in the same way. An empty profession of faith renders us fit only for the fires of God’s judgment (James 2:17). It is possible to be connected to the church and therefore to Jesus – objectively, externally, covenantally, chronologically, confessionally, and yet without saving faith in Christ “*flowing from the unchangeable love of God...*” – and be cut away. Jesus said in another parable that the kingdom of heaven is like a field sown with wheat and tares (Matt 13:24ff).

**Pruning Fruit-bearers** (vv2-3) – The security is found in Christ, in abiding in Christ (vv4-5). And as we bear fruit, He prunes us that we may bear more fruit (v2). It is helpful to notice that in the Greek, “prune” and “clean” are from the same root word. You have already been “pruned/cleaned” (v3) if you abide in Christ. But there is ongoing pruning/cleaning that is to go on in the life of a believer, a fruit-bearer. We are brought under the pruning knife of our loving Father’s Word (Heb 4:12). The Word is to have its way with us and that means that preaching and teaching and when we read our Bibles will not always be sentimental and uplifting. Grapevines require aggressive pruning, as do the followers of Christ. He takes the knife to our sinful habits and attacks our prayerlessness by giving us things we must pray about. He strips away those things we are resting upon instead of Him. He disciplines us “*...for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness*” (Heb 12:10).

**Abiding in Christ and Prayer** (vv7-8) – To abide in Christ is to have His words abide in you (v7). This means that our words align more and more with His words, our heart His heart, our desires His desires. When the Word dwells in us richly, it does so as we sing the Psalms (Col 3:16). We want the prayers of God to become our prayers that “*you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you*” (v7, 16). Think about this, what does a branch desire? What does it exist for? It brings glory to the vine as the vine sends sap to the branch to produce the fruit that glorifies the vine (v8).

**Abiding in the Love and Joy of Christ** (vv9-17) – Abiding in Christ produces great fruit. Likewise, abiding in His love and in His joy produces great obedience. Jesus, abiding in His Father's love, speaks the Father's words, His works are the works His Father desires, He obeys His Father's commands, and He does so in the joy of their mutual indwelling. We are brought into that mutual indwelling which is to say we are brought into the love and joy of the Father and the Son.

The love that the Father has for the Son is likened to the love Christ has for us (v9). This means that His love is not first of all His compassion and pity upon us, but rather His delight in us as the Father delights in His Son (Luke 3:22). He rejoices over you with singing (Zeph 3:17). The angels testify to the rejoicing in heaven over one repenting sinner (Luke 15:10). Jesus intends for that joy, His joy, to abide/remain in you (v11). His abiding joy, which never ceases, is the foundation of our joy being full. The lie of this world is that turning from your sinful pleasures will take all the joy out of life. Jesus insists exactly the opposite – the way to abiding joy is to abide in Him.

To abide in the love of Christ is to keep His commandments (vv9-10, 17), and His commandments can be summarized: Love God, love one another (v12). While we remain His servants, we act more like friends, desiring to be with, please, and work alongside our Friend (vv13-15). His commandments are not burdensome as we abide in Him and He in us (1 John 5:3).

Love is the center of life in the Son and life in the body of Christ, for God is love. Four times Jesus has addressed this (John 13:34, 35, 15:12, 17), and Paul will echo the centrality of love and law-keeping (Rom 13:8). We can only love because we have been loved (1 John 4:19-21) and we only will love like Him when it is the fruit that has come from abiding in Him. We will only rejoice in Him and in the life He is working through us when it is the fruit that has come from abiding in Him. And we will only know we have been loved and rejoiced over by a living and abiding faith in the glories of the Gospel. Christ died and was buried. Christ rose from the dead. And He did those things in love and for the joy set before Him so that you might be put right with God. And only this will usher you into the fellowship of love and joy that He offers, and what makes it possible for you to love your neighbor.

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