

“I AM THE TRUE VINE”**John 15:1*****“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”***

There is a book titled, “The Seven Laws Of Teaching” used in teaching would-be-teachers. The book was originally written by John Milton Gregory in 1884 and has been revised and re-published many times. Under the chapter heading, “The Law Of The Lesson” the first rule is stated as follows: “Begin with what is already well known to the pupil in the lesson or upon the subject, and proceed to the unknown by single, easy, and natural steps, letting the known explain the unknown.” That is, teach from the known to the unknown; begin with what the student already knows and use that knowledge to expand upon the student’s knowledge. It is a principle of teaching today. This was one of my texts when I was in college. No! Not in 1884!

Jesus did not need the book “The Seven Laws Of Teaching” for, as Nicodemus said, “We know that Thou art a teacher come from God..” (John 3:2) He is the Master Teacher. Here in John 15 we see Him using that very principle, starting with what the audience already knew and building upon it. His discourse about the vine and the branches built upon what every Jew knew about God’s use of the vine analogy in the Old Testament.

Jesus often employed earthly analogies to teach heavenly truths. Our previous lessons in this series on The Resurrection, Bread, Light, Door, Shepherd – are graphic illustrations of this. Jesus’ disciples were thoroughly acquainted with vineyards and vines, therefore, He was on familiar ground with them when He said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-dresser” (husbandman, gardener).

There are many studies that deal exclusively with the “branches” and their production of “fruit.” However, for this study I am taking a totally different approach. I want to concentrate more on the Vine than on the fruit. Let us get an overview of this chapter in Four divisions as follows:

I. THE DECLARATION THAT JESUS MADE.

“I am the true vine.” (John 15:1) In this short statement Jesus communicates two major truths.

A. The Analogy That He Uses – “I am the....vine”

Why did He use the analogy of the vine? When He used the image of the vine He was talking about that which was familiar to every Jew. The land promised to Israel was one of “vines and fig trees and pomegranates” (Deut 8:8); they inherited vineyards which they had not planted. (Deut 6:11; Josh 24:13; Neh 9:25). When Moses sent out spies to the Land Of Promise, “they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes which was so large they carried it between two of them on a pole.” (Num 13:23)

It is interesting that the vine was used to represent Jerusalem on coins made in A.D. 66-70. In the Temple built in Herod’s time, was a golden vine. Josephus, the historian,

records that "Above the entrance to the Holy Place was a golden vine with clusters as large as a man." (Josephus, Ant, XV, xi, 3; BJ, V, v, 4)

In the Old Testament Israel was called a vine. Psalm 80:8-9 is a prime example: "You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land." The psalmist continues in v.14 "Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine and the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and the branch that You made strong for Yourself." He concludes in v.17-18 by saying "Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon The Son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name."

"The man of God's right hand" ultimately, of course, is the Messiah and He became the fulfillment of the psalmist's prayer. The use of the phrase, "Son of man" in the Gospels, and references to Christ as being at the "right hand" of God make clear that this is the Lord Jesus. (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; Acts 7:56)

Passages like Isaiah 53 make the connection clear: "He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him," (v.2) This refers, of course, to the Messiah. This verse applies directly to Jesus' claim as the True Vine - "tender shoot", "root out of dry ground" etc.

With this backdrop we understand Jesus' usage of the analogy of the vine. It was truth already known by the Jews. Jesus is identifying Himself with Israel when He uses the analogy of the vine. This the disciples would readily recognize.

B. The Adjective That He Uses – "I am the true vine...."

The word "true" occurs 21 times in John's Gospel. Only 29 times in the entire New Testament! It means "perfect, ideal, noble" and it is the root of the adverb "verily" meaning truly. When Jesus refers to himself as the "true vine" (v. 1) He is once again taking an image for Israel and applying it to Himself. A contrast that was no doubt intentional as Israel, a vine of God's planting, had proved *untrue*. Jer. 2:21 reads, "I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?" When Jesus refers to himself as the True Vine He is making the contrast between Himself, the True Vine, and the Jewish leaders who, by inference, are not true vines. They were false, counterfeit vines.

People get "entwined" and "entangled" in false systems of religion. How can we discern the difference? In Matt 7:16-20 Jesus tells us how to make distinction: "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

In Jesus' declaration we see that He is The Vine and He is The True Vine. He then goes on to identify Himself with God, His Father. Verse one concludes with these words: "my Father is the vinedresser." Think about those words as follows:

II. THE INFORMATION THAT JESUS ADDED.

"my Father is the vinedresser." Jesus began with what these Jews knew – They knew Israel's identity as God's vine. He now moves on to the unknown and adds this information: "my Father is the vinedresser."

The "Vine Truth" in John 15 is one of the most beautiful pictures of the Son's relationship with the Father. He elaborates on this relationship when He says, "my Father." In doing so:

A. He Identifies The Owner Of The Vine. v.1 "my Father"

The "Father" is the Owner of the vineyard. In John 15 Jesus uses "Father" 9 times: (vs.1,8,9,15,16,23,24, & in v.26 twice.) He always identified Himself and what He did with the Father. In John 14 He said, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me..." (John 14:10-11)

It is from the relationship of Christ to the Father that the relationship of believers to Christ takes its character. Examples from John 15 are seen in John 15:9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you"; v.15 "all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you"; v.16 "the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

Jesus is the True Vine in His Father's vineyard. We are to understand that God the Father is the Owner and does what is in His best interest for His vineyard, as is seen in the additional word that Jesus used: "vinedresser."

B. He Identifies The Overseer Of The Vine. v.1 - "the vinedresser."

The Father is both the Proprietor and the Caretaker. The Greek word used to identify what the Father does in relation to the vineyard is a combination of two Greek words: "gee" = "the earth," and "ergo", = "to work." Put together it is "georgos" and denotes a gardener, husbandman, a tiller of the ground, a vinedresser. Translators used different words in translating the Greek "georgos" and all of them are true to the original Greek.

Examples: Translated the word as follows:

- "my Father is the gardener." – NIV
- "My Father is the vinedresser." – NKJV
- "my Father is the husbandman." – KJV
- "my Father is the Farmer." – *The Message*

- “my Father is an earth-tiller.” – Wycliffe

All of these activities performed by the Overseer of the vineyard are seen in Isaiah 5 where the work of the Overseer is graphically detailed. In this passage Israel is again pictured as God’s vineyard. We read of God that:

“He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.” (Isa. 5:2-5) Also v.7 “The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel,”

The Owner, who is the Husbandman, Gardner, Vinedresser, Farmer, Earth-Tiller, oversees His vineyard, nurturing, trimming and protecting the vine. He, of course, has a deep interest in its growth, welfare and its productivity.

Following Jesus’ initial declaration and the basic information contained in it, He then elaborated on His original statement in verse 5 as follows:

III. THE ASSOCIATIONS THAT JESUS ANNOUNCED.

John 15:5 “I am the vine: you are the branches.” Jesus not only declared that He was the True Vine and added the information about His Father being the Vinedresser, but He announced that His followers were the Branches in the Vine!

What is God’s vineyard today? Israel was God’s vineyard and will be again in the future. But the Vineyard of the Lord in this age is the Church. The Church is comprised of the Branches of the True Vine! This association is suggestive of:

A. A Unique Relationship. “I am the vine, you are the branches.”

The uniqueness of the union of the vine to the branches and the branches to the vine is well known in the horticultural world. This union is quite unlike the limbs of the tree. The limbs grow on the side of the tree trunk. However, the branches grow from inside the vine – much like the thumb grows out of one’s hand. Limbs can be broken off the tree by strong winds. Not so with the branches of a vine.

The divine union of the Vine and the branches in God’s Vineyard is likewise unique. The intimate union of believers with Jesus the Vine is indivisible. The branch’s very life depends on this inseparable union with The Vine. It is an eternal relationship.

B. An Unequaled Friendship.

The terminology that Jesus uses changes from that of the vine and its branches to that of “friends” here in this chapter. John 15:14 “You are My friends”; John 15:15 “I have called you friends.” Think of it! Friends of The Vine! The branches are His friends – His friends are His branches!

Abraham was called God's friend (2 Chron 20:7; Is 41:8). Moses likewise was God's friend, for "the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (Ex 33:11; cf. Deut 34:10). Such intimacy with God is open to all who are true branches in the True Vine, Jesus Christ. We see here then, the association that exists between Christ and Christians: we are His branches, His friends. There is yet more:

IV. THE EXPECTATION THAT JESUS COMMUNICATED.

Based upon our relationship and our friendship with the Lord Jesus, The Vine, there are certain expectations to be fulfilled. They are basically two:

A. He Expects Of Us Fellowship. "abide"

This fellowship is best illustrated in the word translated "abide", in the KJV, NKJV and NASB. However,

- The NIV has the word "*remain*";
- The Living Bible uses "*live in*".
- *The Message* has "*make yourselves at home*."
- Wycliffe says, " *dwell in me*"
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The Greek "meno" means to "continue, dwell, endure, remain." (It occurs 11 times in John 15:4,5,6,7,9,10). The branches that do not abide, with all that that means, does not fulfill Christ's expectation of them and consequently is not in fellowship with The True Vine.

George Whitfield conducted outdoor evangelistic campaigns in the 1700's during a period of revival called the "Great Awakening." Thousands responded to his Gospel message. After one of his sermons, someone asked Whitfield how many people were converted. He replied: "We'll know in five years." In other words, the passing of time would show which decisions were superficial and which were genuine. Some would abide, others would not.

Not only does He expect us to fellowship with Him, that is, abide in Him, He also expects us to partner with Him.

B. He Expects Of Us Partnership.

John 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

I stated at the beginning of the lesson that I wanted us to focus upon the Vine more than upon the fruit and/or the branches. However, the lesson would not be complete if we did not understand that we, the branches, are vitally connected to Christ the True Vine and that this partnership, this interconnectivity, results in evidences that are called "fruit."

The Vine desires that His branches cooperate with Him in bearing fruit. The word “fruit” occurs 8 times in this chapter. Notice in particular v.8 “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

1. What does fruit bearing mean?

a. *Bearing fruit is evidence of life.*

Bearing fruit refers to the possession of the Vine’s life. Fruit bearing is accomplished only as we Partner with the Lord Jesus, The Vine, for Jesus says here in v.4 “the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.” AND, in v.5 He emphasizes this truth again when He says, “apart from Me you can do nothing.”

Branches do not bear fruit independently of the vine. The life-force of the Vine must flow into the branch in order to produce fruit. Therefore, “fruit” is first, evidence of life.

b. *Fruit bearing is evidence of likeness.*

A vine, whatever its nature, manifests the characteristics of that particular vine. In speaking about how to detect false prophets Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them.” (Matt.7:16-20) The same principle applies in determining who is a true branch in the True Vine. Fruit reflects the nature of the vine of which the branch is a part. If there is no likeness to Jesus Christ in one’s life, that one is none of His. Paul reminds us in Romans 8:29 that God’s purpose is to conform us to the image of God’s Son. Branches bear the image of the Vine – they bear Vine fruit!

2. What are Jesus’ expectations regarding fruit bearing?

His expectations are basically two:

a. He Expects A Volume Of Fruit.

- v. 2 - minus fruit – “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit....”
- v. 2 - minimum fruit – “every branch that bears fruit....”
- v. 2 - more fruit – “He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”
- v. 8 - much fruit – “bear much fruit.”

What Jesus expects, He inspects. That is why the “pruning” and the “purging” operations take place, referred to in vs. 2 & 3 – which we will not elaborate on at this time. It is obvious that the Lord of the Vineyard expects a volume of fruit. Furthermore, He

b. He Expects A Variety of fruit.

The N.T. specifies some of the fruit that God expects in several scattered places:

- The fruit of the salvation of sinners.
Rom. 1:13 “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles”.
- The fruit of holy lives.
Rom 6:22 “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness...”.
- The fruit of the Spirit of God.
Gal 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”
- The fruit of righteousness.
Heb 12:11 “the peaceable fruit of righteousness...”
- The fruit of praise.
Heb 13:15 “let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.”

SUMMATION

The Vine is Jesus, the Vineyard Owner and Keeper is the Father, we are the branches; we are privileged to have this relationship and friendship with Him; we are to abide in Jesus, part-akeing of His fellowship and proving our partnership by bearing fruit that identifies us with the True Vine.

CONCLUSION

Several questions: (1) Are you connected? Are you connected to the True Vine? (2) Are you a *bearing* branch or a *barren branch*? Remember that Jesus said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.....” (John 15:16)

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