

1. **Introduction:** Jesus made eight “I am” statements: *“I am the bread of life”* (John 6:35), *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8:12), *“I am the door of the sheep ... anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture”* John 10:9), *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”* (John 10:11), *“I am the resurrection and the life”* (John 11:25), *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6) and *“I am the true vine”* (John 15:1). It is the last of the “I am” statements that we are currently studying.
 - ◆ The “true vine” metaphor emphasizes the closeness of Jesus’ union with believers. The spiritual “life-sap” of Jesus, the vine, flows to believers, the branches.
2. **The Circumstances in Which Jesus Told His Disciples He is the True Vine:** As the time of His death came near, Jesus increasingly spent most of His time teaching and preparing His small group of disciples for what lay ahead. They were all familiar with Scripture’s portrayal of Israel as the “Vine of God.” Jesus used that familiarity to give them insight into the relationship He and they would have in the future.
 - ◆ On the night of His betrayal, Jesus and His disciples gathered in the Upper Room to celebrate Passover. At that time, Jesus spoke earnestly of many things.
 - ◆ Jesus knew He was about to die and, though He would be resurrected, He would ultimately be physically separated from them when He went to the Father.
 - ◆ The disciples were frightened by Jesus saying His “hour” had come and He must suffer and die. If Jesus were gone, what would happen to them?
 - ◆ Jesus gave them the very good news that the Holy Spirit would be “their helper.”
 - ◆ Then He told them that He, not Israel, is the “True Vine of God.” The Holy Spirit would bind them (and all believers) to Himself in an exceedingly close forever union. It would be a union so intimate it would be like that between a vine and its branches.
 - ◆ A vine’s branches share in the life sap that flows through the vine.
 - ◆ The key figures in the “True Vine” extended metaphor are Jesus, God the Father, and believers. Jesus is the True Vine. God, the Father, is the Vinedresser. The disciples (all believers) are “in Christ” as the branches.
 - ◆ As the “Vine of God,” Israel failed to produce the good fruit of moral righteousness. God will never be disappointed in Jesus the “True Vine” who will both produce righteous fruit and become the source of righteousness for all who believe.
 - ◆ Yet, shortly after Jesus tells them this metaphor, He will die on a Roman cross. What will happen to the fruit of righteousness when He no longer walks the earth?
 - ◆ His death, as an innocent man is cruel, but it is a necessary part of the Trinity’s plan.

- ◆ Through His atoning death, Jesus will become the source of righteousness apart from perfect obedience to the Law, the only righteousness available to fallen humanity.
 - ◆ Jesus' atoning death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection completed His earthly task.
 - ◆ Jesus is the culmination and fulfillment of all the Old Testament language and imagery about the "Vine of God."
3. **John 15:1-3^{esv}**: ***"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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.***
4. **James Montgomery Boice's Translation of 15:2**: James Montgomery Boice noticed that the order of events in verse 15:2 doesn't fit the usual order of caring for vines.
- ◆ The usual order of care for the vines is to lift up branches that touch the ground and provide them support, cleanse branches of insects and other parasites, and only later to prune away any growth that would hinder producing good fruit.
 - ◆ There are two key Greek words in this verse – "airo" and "katharizo." Each word has several known meanings and implications.
 - ◆ Boice identified 4 meanings for "airo." The most fundamental means "to lift up" and the most figurative means "to take away."
 - ◆ Grapes can't develop properly lying on the ground. Therefore, the vinedresser lifts the branches which are to bear fruit so they do not touch the ground. This keeps the developing grapes hanging free and also makes it easier for the leaves to get sunlight.
 - ◆ If the fundamental meaning "to lift up" is used as the translation rather than "takes away" or "cuts off," the fit to the usual order of tending vines is much better.
 - ◆ Boice's conclusion is that the beginning of verse 2 should read **"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he lifts up."**
 - ◆ In the second part of the verse, the word "katharizo" (source of the English word cartharsis) means to cleanse, make clean, or purify.
 - ◆ Using the primary meaning "cleanse" instead of the secondary meaning "prunes" makes sense of the whole as it once again puts the care of the vines in the usual order.
 - ◆ The verse then reads, **"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he lifts up, and every branch that does bear fruit he cleanses, that it may bear more fruit."** I don't know for sure which translation is correct but Boice's suggestions seem right.
 - ◆ Our understanding of the verse is likely about the same in either case, the point being God cares for the branches by doing what is necessary for them to bear good fruit.

5. **Vine Tending and Spiritual Things**: The concepts for vine dressing have a spiritual interpretation. As proper land is essential for good vines, regeneration and justification are the essential spiritual foundation for developing the fruit of righteousness.

- ◆ Sanctification is the process of cleansing of sin and its residue, as well as, pruning things which may be good in themselves but are hindrances to fruitfulness.
- ◆ Forcing a vine to produce fruit too early invariably causes problems. New believers should strive to produce the fruit of righteousness but recognize that the route to productivity is through developing full commitment and devotion to God.
- ◆ Removing “bad things” and “hindrances” without being filling vacancies with Christ, can lead to an inner vacuum that might be filled by something not Christian at all.
- ◆ We might find ourselves in the position of the man in Christ’s story who threw out one demon but suffered even more when the empty space left behind was filled by that demon returning with seven of his friends.
- ◆ Believers should put off sinful old things, but must replace them with new Christlike attributes. Righteous fruit can only be produced “in Christ” as we replace sinful residues and things that hinder spiritual development with the positive attributes of Christ. Paul says in Ephesians 5:1a, ***“Therefore be imitators of God.”***
- ◆ Cleansing is accomplished through the power of the Word of God which we are to keep constantly before our mind. Psalm 119:9 ***“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.”*** As Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:3, ***“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”***

6. **John 15:1-3 with Boice’s Translation of Verse 2**: ***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he lifts up, and every branch that does bear fruit he cleanses, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”***

- ◆ As vinedresser the Father tends the needs of the vine. He receives and rejoices in its fruit. In all things Jesus, the vine, sought the Father’s will and glory.
- ◆ Jesus sacrificed Himself so as to become the only source of righteousness apart from perfect obedience to the Law. Without that source of righteousness apart from the Law, no could be saved from eternal destruction.
- ◆ He made salvation available to all who would believe, making it possible to have a life before the Father like His.
- ◆ He became the True Vine that we might be true branches. Believers are totally dependent on Him for righteousness and forgiveness of sins.

- ◆ The “True Vine” emphasizes the Father’s care of the vine. Jesus is the vine and believers the branches. To immediately mention removal of unproductive branches from the vine seems odd. Boice’s interpretation avoids that issue.
- ◆ On the other hand, the vine keeper doing first tasks that enable branches to develop properly seems true.
- ◆ Grapes need sunlight and need to hang freely off the ground. Vineyard workers even today go through the vineyard lifting up branches that need it so that they may be better exposed to the sun and so the fruit will develop properly.
- ◆ In spiritual terms the Father enables the necessary foundation for spiritual productivity and cleanses believers of the residue of past sins.
- ◆ Some pruning does occur while the vine is green and growing, but the most severe pruning occurs when the vine has lost its leaves and is dormant.
- ◆ In passing it is interesting to note that because good fruit requires the vine have a sufficient degree of maturity, vines are not usually permitted to produce fruit until their fourth season after planting.
- ◆ Jesus says that His disciples are already clean because the word He has spoken to them has cleansed them. After the proper growth is established, the vine tender does necessary pruning.
- ◆ The analogy for believers is to prune that which is not useful for developing the fruit of the Spirit.
- ◆ Pruned branches at one time looked like good “wood” that would bear fruit but in fact it is not. In spiritual terms this seems to refer to God’s work of protection by removing from a believer’s life that which is spiritually detrimental.
- ◆ Providing a basis for spiritual development, cleansing away sin and its residues, and pruning things that may be good in themselves but are hindrances to fruitfulness is obviously necessary to produce the fruit of righteousness.
- ◆ Removing hindrances to fruitfulness without drawing closer to God in true devotion invariably leads to imagining ourselves to be wonderful saints when we certainly are not. We may begin to look down on others who still do those unspiritual things.
- ◆ We consider them to be worldly and ourselves to be spiritual. Removal of “bad things” and “hindrances” without filling the vacancies with Christ, can lead to a vacuum that makes it easy for something else not at all Christian to fill it.
- ◆ The proper sequence for a believer is cooperate with God as He draws us near.
- ◆ After that, the cleansing from harmful things and removal of hindrances to spiritual growth can proceed.

7. What is Next: John 15:4-5