

1. **Introduction:** Jesus is the “True Vine,” believers are the branches. The Father is the Vinedresser. All benefits of salvation come to believers through the True Vine of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is an allegory that begins with an extended metaphor (1-8) and is followed by explanation and comment (9-17).
 - ◆ Believers are “in Christ” as branches are in their vine. The life that flows in the vine flows in the branches. Branches produce the vine’s fruit, but they can only do so because they are an integral part of the vine.
 - ◆ The Holy Spirit enables believers to be “in Christ” and Christ to be “in believers.” Believers produce good fruit of eternal value only when they faithfully abide in Christ.
 - ◆ The True Vine metaphor emphasizes the proper tending and care of a vine as a necessary condition for producing a plentiful crop of good grapes.
 - ◆ Growing good grapes begins with selection of proper land and proper preparation.
 - ◆ Good sites are on free-draining, gentle south-facing slopes that are not exposed to strong winds or late frost, have lots of sunshine and acceptable average temperatures.
 - ◆ Vines can thrive on many free-draining soil types if the appropriate root stock is matched to the soil. The soil type, root stock, and site characteristics impact the taste of the grapes and any wine produced.
 - ◆ Vines develop best when only the roots are watered. Water standing on the leaves tends to cause fungus.
 - ◆ For grapes to develop properly they need sunlight and to hang freely off the ground.
 - ◆ Vineyard workers go through the vineyard lifting up branches that are touching the ground and providing them support. They also cleanse the branches of insects and other parasites. Later they prune away any growth that would hinder producing good fruit.
 - ◆ Some pruning may occur while the vine is green and growing, but the most severe pruning is done when the vine has lost its leaves and is dormant. Even some good wood must be pruned to increase the yield or improve the quality of the fruit.
 - ◆ A vine must have a degree of maturity before it can produce good fruit. Typically, vines are not permitted to produce fruit until their fourth or fifth season after planting.
 - ◆ Grapevines bear wonderful fruit but seem to be not much good for anything else. The wood is not suitable for building or making articles for household use. The vine is always gnarled and twisted, and its wood soft. When it dries, the vine dries is brittle.
 - ◆ It doesn’t even make good firewood. It burns fast without producing much heat.
 - ◆ William Barclay says Jewish law required people, at certain times of the year, to bring wood offerings to the temple. Wood from vines was unacceptable. It was useless for the hot fires needed for sacrifices. A vine’s value is totally the production of good fruit.
 - ◆ The Vinedresser protects, purifies (lifts up and cleanses), and prunes the branches.

- ◆ For believers Word of God performs analogous functions – like a mirror the Word of God reveals problems (James 1:23-24), like a sword God’s Word cuts to the heart (Hebrews 4:12) with its cleansing power.

2. **John 15:4-5:** *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

- ◆ “What does it mean to “abide” in Christ?” Perhaps, the first thing to be noticed is that “abiding” pertains only to those who are already Christians.
- ◆ Jesus declares He is the Vine and believers are “in Him” as branches. Only believers are branches.
- ◆ Believers have believed the Word spoken to them by Jesus. The disciples in particular and believers in general have been cleansed of the effects of sin just as branches of the vine are cleaned of insects and other troublesome parasites.
- ◆ Those being saved believe in Jesus as the Son of God through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. They believe in Christ and recognize Him as Savior. They commit themselves to Him as Lord of their lives.
- ◆ What then is the distinction between “being in Christ” and “abiding in Christ?”
- ◆ Believers become spiritually “in Christ” when the Holy Spirit works faith in them, thereby uniting them to Christ in effectual calling. They are then “in Christ.”
- ◆ What does it mean to “abide in Christ?” John clarifies this point in 1 John 3:24 as he speaks of Jesus, saying, *“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”*
- ◆ Obedience is necessary “to abide in Him.” Believers know they abide in Christ by knowing they willfully obey His commandments.
- ◆ How can believers know Christ abides in them? Believers are safe “in Christ” by God’s grace and abide in Christ by obeying His commandments. The knowledge Christ abides in them is imparted to them by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- ◆ To abide “in Christ,” believers must consciously make choices that obediently cooperate with the gracious work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. A few examples are:
- ◆ (1.) Choosing to study God’s Word to learn what He has revealed about Himself and what duties He requires of us.
- ◆ (2.) Praising, thanking, and talking to Him in prayer.
- ◆ (3.) In obedience sharing one another’s burdens. (4.) Confessing sin and other faults.
- ◆ (5.) Fellowship with one another in which we help each other, learn about Christ from each other, and see Christ active in one another.
- ◆ In John 14:15, Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”*

- ◆ Obedience to Christ demonstrates love for Him. Obedience is abiding in Christ.
 - ◆ Abiding in Christ will yield a fruitful life. Our character will be transformed into a likeness of Christ and we will be used by the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in the lives of others. Obedience comes first!
 - ◆ Note, that abiding through obedience means everyone of any age, of any economic or social position, good health or bad can abide in Christ and live a fruitful life.
 - ◆ Abiding in Christ and Christ abiding in us are inseparable conditions.
 - ◆ Believers abide “in Christ” by their obedience. Christ dwells in believers through the Holy Spirit. Christ’s obedience is always to the Father. His attitude is always “not My will but Your will be done.”
 - ◆ “Abiding” is a necessary condition for fruitfulness. To bear fruit acceptable to God, a branch must remain vitally connected to the vine. Maintaining vital connectivity to the vine requires proper nourishment and care.
 - ◆ The last part of verse 5 introduces a warning, lest in our eagerness to bear fruit for God, we forget that bearing fruit is not possible without Christ.
 - ◆ Jesus says, “*Apart from me you can do nothing.*” Out of zeal for Christ it is possible to attempt to do things we yearn to do for Him, yet attempt to do them in our own strength apart from Him.
 - ◆ Such efforts will inevitably fail to produce fruit acceptable to God.
 - ◆ Note another implication. If Christians must be careful to be sure their actions are “in Christ” and not apart from Him – what of unbelievers who don’t have Christ at all?
 - ◆ Unbelievers may try to destroy the work of Christ, they may work against the gospel, but in the end all their effort will come to nothing, for they strive apart from Christ.
3. **What is the Fruit God Desires:** What is the fruit that Jesus expects believers to produce?
- ◆ Most likely the first thoughts are of outward acts like evangelism and charity. Outward acts are certainly important, but Jesus seems initially to focus on inward righteousness.
 - ◆ I am convinced that the fruit Jesus expects us to produce begins with the fruit of the Spirit in our own heart.
 - ◆ We are to focus on becoming Christlike in character through our cooperation with what the Holy Spirit is doing in our life. As we become Christlike, we will inevitably produce the outward fruit of righteousness.
 - ◆ Our inner being controls the flow thoughts, words, and actions. The Holy Spirit works to develop the fruit of the spirit within our inner being.
 - ◆ Galatians 5:22: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control.*” Our part is to recognize the Spirit’s work and cooperate with Him.

- ◆ When believers possess and actively use these Christ-like qualities, the Holy Spirit will use their love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control to produce fruit in the lives of others.
- ◆ Identifying the initial fruit Jesus expects believers to produce as being the fruit of the Spirit in our own heart makes sense of the statement “*apart from me you can do nothing.*” It also seems to put things in the right order – transformation in our own heart before producing fruit in the lives of others.

4. **What does Jesus mean by the warning, “*apart from me you can do nothing*”?** At first thought, this statement doesn’t seem to make sense.

- ◆ Everything unbelievers do is done apart from Christ.
- ◆ Moreover, in God’s common grace, “good things” can be done apart from Christ.
- ◆ Kindness and generosity are often found in unbelievers. On the other hand, believers can and often do disobedient things including being unkind and ungenerous.
- ◆ So what does Jesus mean? The key is that He says, “*apart from me you can do nothing.*” He is speaking only to believers.
- ◆ Unbelievers can do good things apart from Christ. They can practice generosity toward the poor, make an honest living, and raise a good family.
- ◆ But Jesus’ point is that believers can only accomplish things of eternal significance “in Christ.” Apart from Him, believers can do nothing of eternal importance. Apart from Him, there is no salvation!
- ◆ I think Jesus in particular means that, only in a connection with Him that is as close as that between a vine and its branches, can a person become like Christ in holy character (a true image of God). To become like Him, we must have His life flowing through us.
- ◆ Only by being holy as God is holy can anyone live in His presence. The fruit of Christ-likeness develops in our inner being, enabled by the “sap” of Christ, the True Vine flowing in them. As we become “like Christ,” we behave more and more like Christ, focusing on doing things of eternal significance.
- ◆ Becoming holy and righteous in character and behavior is totally dependent on a vital living connection to Christ (being “in Christ”).
- ◆ Success in pleasing Christ demands careful, faithful, obedient abiding in Christ so that none of our actions are ever apart from Him. Apart from Him, we can do nothing!

5. **What is Next:** John 15:6-11.