

1. **Introduction:** The “True Vine” metaphor is a powerful picture of a believer’s relationship with Christ. Believers are like branches “in the Vine.” The Vine’s life flows in them.
 - ◆ The life-giving union between a believer and Christ is necessary for living a godly life that produces the fruit of righteousness.
 - ◆ To bear fruit, a branch must abide in the vine. Abiding requires obedience (1John 3:24).
 - ◆ The True Vine metaphor hinges on two key precepts. Precepts are principles imposing a standard of conduct. “Abide in Christ” and “love one another.”
 - ◆ In the next few verses Jesus completes His discussion of the True Vine.
2. **John 15:12-13:** *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”*¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.”*
 - ◆ Within limits, Jesus’ self-sacrificing love is to be the pattern for believer’s love for one another. What is the limit? Even if a believer sacrifices themselves, their self-sacrifice cannot duplicate the infinite atoning and redemptive benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice.
 - ◆ Jesus atoning self-sacrifice was completely unique, an act no one can duplicate..
 - ◆ Yet, the self-sacrificing nature of His love is to be reflected in believers’ creaturely love for one another as they deny themselves for the benefit of others.
 - ◆ In life there is no greater manifestation of self-denying love than being willing to die for someone. But it would not be the same as Jesus’ death for us.
 - ◆ We love one another because Christ first loved us. Our Christian love for one another is an extension of His love for us. It is “the love of God poured into our hearts” (Romans 5:5) so abundantly that it overflows into the lives of others.
3. **John15:14-15:** *“You are my friends if you do what I command you.”*¹⁵ *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”*
 - ◆ Consistently striving to be obedient reveals that a person is Jesus’ friend , and that they abide in His love.
 - ◆ Jesus revealed His mission to His disciples. They know what He is doing.
 - ◆ They know why Jesus was sent by the Father, why He was going to lay down His life, why He had to leave this earth, what He would do at His return.
 - ◆ Therefore, Jesus says their obedient love for Him show the closeness of the fellowship between the Master and His disciples making them His friends.
4. **John15:16:** *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”*

- ◆ Earthly friendships usually develop through mutual choice, but friendship with Jesus is different. Its origin is one-sided. We did not choose Him. He chose us. The ground for His love is never something in us but is always in Him alone.
- ◆ Jesus' love for believers is unconditional and sovereign. Believers were elected out of a world of darkness to be "in Christ" that they might follow and abide in Him.
- ◆ Our Lord sets us apart from the world and works His graces in us – love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- ◆ This verse concludes with a repetition of the thought of verse 7, but with the change from the impersonal "*it will be done for you,*" to the personal "*he may give it to you.*"
- ◆ The Father loves the Son and, hence, He loves those who do the Son's bidding.

5. John 15:17, "*These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*"

- ◆ Every believer is to follow the Savior's prescription enabling them to abide in His love and within God's will to be assured of answers to prayer. Jesus will enable a love for others that will astound the watching world.
- ◆ Jesus' prescription begins with obedience but doesn't stop there. Failing to obey demonstrates a lack of love for Him, and prevents consistency in abiding in Him.
- ◆ Obey Him, honor Him, praise Him, and bring glory to Him by being fruitful. Remember that bringing glory to God means to properly acknowledge Him as who He is, Creator and sustainer of the universe and all that is in it, Savior and Lord.
- ◆ Believers who abide in Jesus will bear righteous fruit and will have love for one another expressed in concrete ways that encourages and edifies.

6. Closing Comments: As we end our study of **What it Means to be "In Christ," remember**

- ◆ Being "in the True Vine" means salvation, a loving relationship with our Lord, and the ability to produce the fruit of moral righteousness that He demands.
- ◆ Obedience is necessary to "abide and thrive" in the True Vine. Other relationships cannot possibly be as close, as productive, or as valuable as abiding in Christ.

Special Topic on Angels

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1. About Angels: There are more than 270 references to angels in the Bible. Like humans, Angels are creatures. They were created before humanity in huge numbers. Hebrews 12:22 refers to innumerable angels. Both Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 5:11 refer to ten thousand times ten thousand (i.e., 100 million) plus thousands of thousands.

- ◆ Humans are all descended by procreation from Adam and Eve. Humans increased in number gradually. Angels do not procreate. They were created as individuals but all at once. There are no baby angels, no mom and dad angels.
- ◆ Since angels do not die (Lk 20:34-36), their number is fixed at the creation number.

- ◆ Angels are persons. They have a “nature” and a source of identity (an “I”).
- ◆ They have emotions (Lk 2:13-15; 15:1-10), intelligence (2 Sam 14:10, 2 Cor 11, 14), and will (2 Timothy 2:26).
- ◆ Angels are capable of assuming different forms, both invisible and visible to humans.
- ◆ Animals may detect their presence even when they are invisible to human senses (Num 22:22-35, Balaam and his donkey) and (2 Kings 6:9-19, Elisha’s servant’s eyes opened to see the protecting angel’s chariots of fire).
- ◆ As God’s servants, angels do whatever He bids them do. Psalm 103:20, ***“Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!”***

2. **Categories of Angels:** There are several sub-categories of angels, but for now we will consider only the two broad categories of “faithful holy angels” and “fallen angels.” All angels have “freedom of will” within the condition of their “innermost being.” Their strongest inclination at the time of choice determines the choice.

- ◆ **Fallen angels.** Satan is the leader of fallen angels. He was created as a holy angel but fell before Adam. Isaiah 14:12 seems to give Satan’s pre-fall name as Lucifer. Satan’s pride led to his fall. He became the ruler of this world and the prince of the power of the air (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2).
- ◆ He is an accuser (Revelation 12:10), a tempter (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5), and a deceiver (Genesis 3; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 20:3).
- ◆ Satan is the ultimate source behind every false cult and world religion. Satan will do anything and everything in his power to oppose God and those who follow God.
- ◆ Fallen angels became demons. Demons demonstrate their free will in several passages of Scripture. Legion *chose* a herd of pigs as their destination (Luke 8:32). In Micaiah’s vision, God allows a spirit to *choose* how to bring ruin upon King Ahab (1 Kings 19).
- ◆ **Holy angels** (Mark 8:38) are those who did not choose to follow Satan. They are the “elect” angels (1 Timothy 5:21). They are confirmed in holiness.

3. **Attributes and Activities:** Humans exist as a union of a physical body with an immaterial soul. Angels are pure spirit beings (Heb 1:14).

- ◆ Angels can appear in human form and seem so like a human that they eat food, as some did with Abraham (Gen 18:1-15). Other examples of human-like appearances of angels include at Sodom (19:1,2), and at Jesus’ empty tomb (Mk 16:5)
- ◆ Angels when visible may shine with glorious light (Mt 28:3, Lk 2:9), and at other times appear as fabulous multi-winged creatures – seraphim and cherubim (Ex 25:20, Is 6:2).
- ◆ As spirits, the form of angels assume in earthly appearances varies to fit their assigned task. They are not omnipresent or omniscient and are not to be worshipped.
- ◆ Angels are active in many ways. God often uses angels as His messengers.
- ◆ The Hebrew word for angel (*malak*) and Greek (*angelos*) both mean messenger.

- ◆ Examples as messengers include visiting Hagar (Gen 16:7-12), Zacharias (Lk 1:11-22), Mary (Lk 1:26-28, the shepherds (Lk 2:8-15), Joseph (Mt 1:20, 2:13, 2:19-38), the women at the tomb (Mt 28:2-7, Lk 24:4-5), Philip (Acts 8:26), Cornelius (Acts 10:3-8, 22), Paul (Acts 27:23-24), John (Rev 1:1-2), and many others.
 - ◆ Though they are pure spirit beings, angels speak and interact with the physical world. Acts 5:19, ***“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,²⁰ “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.”*** Also with Abraham (Gen 18:1-15) and at Sodom (Gen 19:1,2).
 - ◆ Other activities include, (1.) Worship and praise of God (Job 38:7, Ps 103:20, Is :1-3, Rev 4:8, Rev 5:9-12). (2.) Communication of God’s message to men. Assisted in bringing the law (Acts 7:38,53). Revealing the future (Dan 10:10-15; Rev 17:1, 21:9, 22:16). Gabriel announced the births of John the Baptist (Mt 1:19 – 24) and Jesus (Lk 1:11-28, 2:9-12).
 - ◆ (3.) Angels minister to believers. Examples include, (1.) Delivering the apostles from prison (Acts 5:19, 12:6-4). Rejoicing at the conversion of sinners (Lk 15:10). Angels are present within the church – 1Cor 11:10).
 - ◆ (4.) Angels will be God’s agents in the final earthly judgments and second coming of Christ (Rev 19:17- 20:3, 10).
3. **Angels are active in today’s world:** More than 150 years ago, John Paton and his wife were in the New Hebrides as missionaries to a people group who were cannibals.
- ◆ On a very dark night, cannibals surrounded their dwelling with every intention of killing them. They both fell on their knees and prayed fervently that God would protect them. All through the night they could hear the cannibals shouting but nothing else happened. As the sun began to rise they saw the cannibals retreating into the forest.
 - ◆ They thanked God for protecting them and continued their work. About a year later the chief of the tribe that had surrounded them was converted. Later, John Paton spoke to the chief about that night of terror and asked why the tribe had not attacked the house.
 - ◆ The chief replied with a question. He asked, “who were all those men who were with you?” John said no one was with him except his wife. The chief began to argue saying “There were hundreds of tall men in shining garments with drawn swords circling about your house, so we could not attack. True story! 4
4. **The Angel of the Lord (A Special Case):** In the OT (but not in the NT) there are reports of the ministry of special angel called the “Angel of the Lord.” While there are many things that can be said about Him, today I am content to say that this special angel is considered a pre-incarnate manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. **What is Next:** We will examine what we know about the state of the soul in the disembodied state between mortal death resurrection.