

## **“JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN” SERIES**

### **#28: “The Vine and the Branches”**

**SCRIPTURE:** John 15:1-17

#### **INTRO:**

Jesus often taught His disciples by having them focus on common, everyday things, like fishing, shepherding, and foot-washing. In this case, He has His disciples focus on vineyards and their care.

The nation of Israel is referred to in Isaiah 5 as *“the vineyard of the Lord.”* The coins minted in Israel during the 400 years before Christ bore the image of a vine.

Now Jesus points out several important things pertaining to this. First of all, He makes it clear that...

***...HE IS THE VINE, AND GOD IS THE VINEDRESSER.***

The nation of Israel was a “shadow” or “fore-figure” of the vine. Christ was the actual vine. God is the caretaker of the vineyard, seeing that it has what it needs to bear fruit and pruning it when necessary.

The Greek word translated “vinedresser” or “husbandman” or “farmer” is GEORGOS, the word from which the proper name “George” is derived.

How many of you have had a “grape arbor”? When I was a teenager, we had grape vines across our back yard. The grapes were purple.

One of the elders in our church had a good-sized vineyard as a hobby. He grew several different kinds of grapes, especially those that were also grown in Israel. He supplied the grape juice for our Communion service. I remember when he provided *white* grape juice for the Communion service. Some of the congregation objected to it since it didn’t exactly look like blood.

Evidently, Jesus used information familiar to the disciples to teach them what their relationship to Him, the Father, and each other would be in the kingdom.

He explains that...

***...HE IS THE VINE, AND WE ARE THE BRANCHES.***

There used to be an explanation of this going around that claimed that this is teaching that the branches represent the many denominations of the church, but it's been a long time since I've heard anyone express such a view.

Jesus is the vine, the part of the plant that comes up out of the ground, and we individual disciples are the branches.

The vinedresser sees to it that the branch has everything it needs to produce fruit-bearing branches. The vine gives its branches everything they need to be fruitful. It's the branches, not the vine, that produce the fruit.

This is a lesson about the relationship we must have with Christ if we are going to be fruitful. We must be connected to Him if we are going to be living, thriving, fruit-producing branches. If we're not connected, we're going to wither and die.

How do we "connect" with Christ? There are three ways:

1. We connect with Christ through personal devotion and prayer and meditation;
2. We connect with Christ through Scripture study; and
3. We connect with Christ through the fellowship of the church. The church is "the body of Christ." Our joining other believers in worship and fellowship keeps us connected to Him. We cannot be connected to Christ if we ignore His body, the church. This is a simple truth that so many people don't get.

Jesus says,

***THE VINEDRESSER PRUNES THE FRUITFUL BRANCHES AND CUTS OFF THE FRUITLESS BRANCHES.***

If I remember correctly, my father used to prune our grape arbor seasonally, and cut away the fruitless branches.

Jesus says here that the vinedresser ***“takes away every branch that does not bear fruit”*** and ***“prunes every branch that does bear fruit that it may bear more fruit”*** (v. 2).

If we are the branches, what is the fruit that we are to bear? In other words, what do the grapes or fruit of the vine represent? I believe they represent souls won to Christ and the good works that we do to the glory of God.

I believe the “pruning” that the vinedresser does is in the form of godly chastening and worldly tribulations. Some translations render the Greek CATHAROI as “cleansing.” We get our English word “catharsis,” which means “a purification,” from this Greek word. James explains in verses 2 through 4 of his first chapter: ***“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials and various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”***

Most of the strongest and most fruitful Christians I know have been through an extraordinary number of trials and times of great difficulty. I believe that the trials Kaylene and I have been through have made us stronger, more fruitful members of the body of Christ.

Jesus says,

***BRANCHES THAT DO NOT ABIDE IN HIM WITHER AND DIE AND ARE BURNED UP IN THE FIRE.***

What does He mean by ***“Abide in me”***? How do we ***“abide”*** in Him?

The Greek word translated ***“abide”*** is MENO, M-E-N-O. It means “continue, dwell, endure, remain, stand, or tarry” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words).

Okay, so, how do we ***“abide in”*** Christ? To ***“abide in”*** Christ is to maintain a proper vine-branch relationship with Him. You know,

the branches of a grapevine are totally dependent upon that vine for sustenance. The vine carries water to the branches. The vine carries nutrients to the branches. That vine gives *life* to the branches. Therefore, to *“abide in”* Christ is to *stay connected*. If we don’t stay connected, we’ll wither and die, and we’ll be cut off and burned up.

Now, what does this do to the popular doctrine of “once saved, always saved”? It blows it away, doesn’t it? It goes along with Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:13: *“He who endures to the end will be saved.”* Then, In Revelation 2:10 He says, *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you a crown of life.”*

So,

***WE ARE TO BEAR MUCH FRUIT, THUS GLORIFY GOD.***

As I’ve already pointed out, I believe the *“fruit”* He’s referring to here are souls won to Him and the good works that we do as we serve Him throughout our lives. These are the things that glorify God.

In Matthew 5:13-16 He said, *“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.*

*<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*

So, the bottom line is that we must be connected to the vine so that we can glorify God, otherwise, we’ll die spiritually and be cut off and disposed of.

Finally, here’s the motivation:

***WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS HE HAS LOVED US.***

But let me ask you something: Can we be ordered to love? Can love be commanded? I want to remind you at this point that Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to ***“love the lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind”*** (Matthew 22:37) and that the second was to ***“love your neighbor as yourself”*** (Matthew 22:39).

If you consider love an emotion, it can't be commanded. But if we understand love from God's point of view, I believe it can. Let me see if I can explain what I'm saying.

The word translated ***“love”*** in the New Testament is the Greek AGAPE. Agape love is not romantic love. The Greek for romantic love is EROS, from which we get our word erotic. Agape love is not brotherly love. The Greeks called that PHILEO, as in philanthropy or Philadelphia.

Agape love is the love God has for us. It's an unconditional love. It doesn't need any motivation. God loves us because we are here, and we need to be loved. There's nothing we can do to keep God from loving us, and there's nothing we can do to repay Him.

So, the love that God has for us isn't an emotion. It's a decision He made when He created us. Our love for God and for each other is much the same. It takes on the form of ***“loyalty.”*** God commands our loyalty. The first of the Ten Commandments is ***“You shall have no other gods before me.”*** In other words, ***“Choose to be loyal only to me.”***

So, when Jesus tells us to love one another as He loves us, He's telling us to *choose* to be loyal to one another, to be kind, considerate, forgiving, compassionate, etc., etc.

When we're involved in a romantic or friendly relationship, self-love is always a part of it. There's something that the relationship provides us; we get something out of it. But the love Christ wants us to have for one another – for our neighbor – has no self-interest involved. It has nothing to do with what it does for us. So, the object of our love may be repulsive, mean, or indifferent – it doesn't matter. Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century wrote: ***“Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally***

*secured against every change, eternally made free in blessed independence, eternally and happily secured against despair” (Works of Love).* Agape love doesn’t come and go with the winds of emotion; it doesn’t change with the times.

## **IN CLOSING...**

1<sup>ST</sup> John 4:19 – *“We love because He first loved us.”* Until we’ve accepted His love for us, we cannot truly love one another.