

Bible Study August 16, 2023

JOHN 15 – MARKS OF A DISCIPLE (ESV)

I Am the True Vine

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

The grapevine is a useful, prolific plant. A single vine supports numerous branches and bears many grapes. In the Old Testament, grapes symbolize Israel’s fruitfulness in doing God’s work on the earth (Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Ezekiel 19:10-14).

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.

Jesus makes a distinction between two kinds of pruning: (1) cutting off branches and (2) cutting back branches. Fruitful branches are cut back to promote growth. In other words, God must sometimes discipline his people to strengthen our character and faith. But branches that don’t bear fruit are cut off at the trunk not only because they are worthless but also because they can infect the rest of the plant.

⁴ 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.

In this chapter, answered prayer, joy, and love are mentioned as fruit (15:7, 11, 12). Galatians 5:22-24 and 2 Peter 1:5-8 describe additional fruit: qualities of Christian character.

What does fruitful look like:

Galatians 5:22-24 (ESV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

2 Peter 1:5-8 (ESV) ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Jesus is the Vine, and God is the Gardener, who carefully plants and cares for the branches with one purpose—that they may bear fruit. The branches are all those who claim to be followers of Jesus. The fruitful branches are true believers who, by their union with him, produce much fruit. Being united with Jesus means drawing our energy and nourishment from him (see Colossians

2:6-7). But those who don't bear fruit—those who make only a superficial commitment to Jesus—will be separated from the Vine. Unfruitful “followers” are useless and will be cut off and tossed aside.

There is much debate over this verse on whether this is true disciples that can lose their salvation and get cast into eternal judgement in hell. The bible teaches that the believer is secure in Jesus' hands.

John 10:28–30 (ESV)

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Many people try to be good and honest. But Jesus says that to live a truly good life we must stay close to him, like a branch attached to its vine. In the same way that plants receive nutrients from their roots, we receive life-giving water from the Holy Spirit and food from God's Word. These provide spiritually regenerative power. Jesus told his disciples they could ask for anything that would increase fruit bearing. Apart from Jesus, we lose this connection and our efforts are unfruitful. Are you receiving and thriving from the nourishment offered by Jesus, the Vine?

When we produce “much fruit,” like a fruitful branch, we glorify God. Each day he sends the sunshine and rain to make the crops grow, and constantly he nurtures each tiny plant and prepares it to blossom. This farming analogy shows how God is glorified when people come into a right relationship with him and begin to “produce much fruit” in their lives.

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

When things are going well, we feel elated. When hardships come, we sink into sorrow. But true joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstance. Joy comes from a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ. When our lives are intertwined with his, he will help us walk through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep us levelheaded, no matter how high or low our circumstances.

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

We are to love each other as Jesus loved us, and he loved us enough to give his life for us. We may or may not have to die for someone, but we can also practice sacrificial love in other ways: listening, helping, encouraging, giving. Think of someone who needs this kind of love today, and give all the love you can.

14 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.

Psalm 103:7 (ESV) He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. God reveals his ways to his friends.

Because Jesus Christ is our Lord and Master, he has the right to call us servants; instead, he regards us as friends. How comforting and reassuring that he not only chose us but also wants us to be his friends! Because he is our Lord and Master, we owe him our unqualified obedience and should listen to everything he says; because we are his friends, we should love him and others the way he loves us.

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.

Jesus made the first choice—to love and to die for us, to invite us to live with him forever. We make the next choice—to accept or reject his offer. Without his choice, we would have no choice to make.

17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Christians will get plenty of hatred from the world; from each other we need love and support. Do you allow small problems to get in the way of loving other believers? Jesus commands that you love them, and he will give you the strength to do it.

The Hatred of the World

18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. 21 But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. 25 But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’

Jesus would shine the light on people and they would see their own wicked deeds and instead of respond to Jesus in repentance they responded in hatred. So as Christ followers, people will hate us as well.

- **John 17:15 (ESV)** Jesus doesn't pray that they come out of the world, but that God would protect them from the evil one.

- **1 John 3:13-14 (ESV)** ¹³Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

Once again Jesus offers hope. The Holy Spirit gives strength to endure the unreasonable hatred and evil in our world and the hostility many have toward Jesus. These words offer special comfort for those facing persecution. Jesus uses two names for the Holy Spirit here—“Helper/Advocate” and “Spirit of truth.” The word Advocate conveys the helping, encouraging, and strengthening work of the Spirit. Spirit of truth points to his teaching, illuminating, and reminding work. The Holy Spirit ministers to both the head and the heart, and both dimensions are important.