

## John 15:1-6 – “The Vine and Its Branches”

(Pew Bible Page: 901)

**Intro:** As Jesus and His disciples went out into the cool night air of Springtime Judea, Jesus continued the discourse He began in the upper room. As they passed the temple on their way to Gethsemane, they saw a golden grapevine on the temple gate, the symbol of Israel. It may have been just at that moment that Christ resumed His discourse with the striking words, *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”* Our study tonight will focus on those words and on Jesus’ insistence that His disciples were branches on the vine, destined to bear fruit for His and His Father’s glory. What did He mean when He called Himself, *“the true vine”*? And why did He differentiate between two kinds of branches? Why did He call His Father, *“the vinedresser”*? All of these questions and more await us as we look into these six verses. The Big Idea we’ll be dealing with tonight is that...

**Proposition:** Our restored fellowship with God through Christ leads to fruitfulness as we abide in union with Jesus.

The movements of our study tonight will be: (vv.1-2) The Vine and Its Branches; (vv.3-5) True Branches Abide in the Vine; (v.6) False Branches are Separated from the Vine.

(vv.1-2) The Vine and Its Branches – Jesus began this part of His discourse with the striking words, **John 15:1–2 - 1** *“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.* What did He mean by this? The nation of Israel was often pictured in the Old Testament as a vine planted, tended, and cherished by God. Israel was beloved of God, and He sought “fruit” from His cherished people – faithfulness, gratitude, and godliness. But Israel had not been faithful. Many times, she had rebelled against God, committing terrible acts of unfaithfulness which God compared to “wild grapes” that were of no use as fruit to the vineyard owner. Jesus now said, *“I am the true vine,”* the real Israel of God. In saying this Jesus represented Himself as the “completion and fulfillment of Israel.”<sup>1</sup> God had sought a people taken from the world for the purpose of “glorifying Him and enjoying Him forever,” but Israel had refused, insisting on following their own fallen hearts rather than relying on God’s revelation of Himself. So, Jesus had come to *complete the mission* the nation had rejected; He had come to *fulfill the purpose* of God that Israel turned away from. By God’s design, Jesus is now the rootstock of all humanity called out of the world and set apart for God’s glory. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, the foundation upon which all who believe build their lives. Jesus is *“the true vine.”*

Jesus went on to speak in verse two about two kinds of branches that are attached to this *“true vine”* – those who bear fruit and some who do not. He speaks of the fruitful and the fruitless and picking up on the final words of verse one tells us that His Father is *“the vinedresser.”* A vinedresser in first century Judea had the responsibility of caring for the vines and making them as fruitful as

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<sup>1</sup> Lexham Bible Dictionary

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possible. A vinedresser would know His vineyard intimately, understanding what each branch needed to make it grow the maximum quantity and the highest quality of fruit. Vinedressers would prune fruitful branches skillfully, knowing just where to cut, how much to trim, and even precise angles of cutting that needed to be made, all designed to make sure that the finest fruit possible was produced by each branch on the vine. And if branches didn't produce fruit, the vinedresser had no hesitation in cutting them off entirely. All this is pictured by Jesus in verse two, where He tells us that there are two kinds of branches on the vine.

Now, it hardly need be explained that what Jesus has in mind here are two kinds of “believers” who are associated with Him through His church. He tells us that plainly in verse 5: **John 15:5** *I am the vine; you are the branches.* In the visible church there are two kinds of people symbolized here as branches – those who bear fruit for God's glory and those who are unfruitful. Let's examine what Jesus mean by “fruit.”

In His earthly ministry Jesus associated “fruit” with the coming of the kingdom. As we look into the gospels, we find Jesus saying in Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25 and Luke 22:18, “**Matthew 26:29 - 29** *I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*” The fruit being produced, then, is for the coming kingdom. Jesus is seeking “branches,” believers in other words, who will bear His likeness; who are Godly; who are submissive to God the Father; who are faithful even unto death, as was Jesus Himself. Jesus endured in the face of persecution. He did not abandon His mission. Those are the kinds of believers that the Father is seeking; these are the kinds of people who will enjoy life with Him in His kingdom. When He finds them, The Father prunes them – nurtures them into greater fruitfulness. But when He encounters fruitless branches, He cuts them off, as we'll see below in verse 6. What is being discussed here is faithfulness as opposed to apostasy.

Apostasy refers to some who seem to place their faith in Jesus, but later turn their backs on Him. They do not endure to the end. Some theologians think that these people were saved, but later lost their salvation, but that can't be true because the Bible is very clear that once an individual is united with Christ through faith, he or she is sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of final salvation. So those who apostatize are people who profess faith in Christ, but never actually receive Him as their Lord and Savior. These people have false faith, or what John Calvin referred to as “temporary faith.” True faith endures; false faith or temporary faith does not. This is why Jesus raises the question of apostasy in verse 6 and discusses the need to abide in Him in verses 3-5, to which we now turn.

(vv.3-5) True Branches Abide in the Vine – In these verses, Jesus discussed the qualities found in a true believer. **John 15:3-5** - **3** *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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*

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*me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* How does one become a true branch? Jesus tells us in verse 3 that we become truly His by being washed clean by the word He has spoken to us. What does this mean? This is simply referring to putting our faith in Christ. When we trust and obey what He says to us, that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that He was buried; that He was raised again from the dead according to the Scriptures – when this is believed and relied upon, we are washed clean. All our sins are forgiven, and God the Father seals our hearts for final salvation by sending the Holy Spirit to indwell those who believe. Jesus said to His disciples, *“Already you are clean,”* Judas having already departed from His presence. Judas was one of those fruitless branches, but the other eleven were true believers, so Jesus said to them, *“Already you are clean.”* That answers the question of how one becomes a true branch, but how does a true branch become fruitful?

In verses 4 and 5 Jesus goes on to reveal to us the secret of fruitfulness: It is to abide in Him. That word *“abide”* is variously translated as either *“remain”* or *“abide”* or even *“live in me.”* However, it’s translated, the idea is the same: Those who abide stay in living union with Christ, the true vine. Union with Christ means enduring in the faith and continual drawing of life from the vine. In other words, you stay put in Jesus. Fruit bearing is the natural consequence of this abiding. Jesus makes it clear in verse 4 that anyone who doesn’t abide in Him cannot possibly bear fruit. And He reiterates the point in verse 5: Those who abide in Him bear much fruit because of the skillful art of Vinedresser. *“Apart from me,”* He said, *“You can do nothing.”* So, the secret to bearing fruit is simply this: stay close to Jesus. The bearing of fruit, which is the evidence of true union with Christ, is a natural and inevitable consequence of our union with Jesus through the coming of the Holy Spirit into the believer’s life. But, what about those who don’t abide? Let’s go on to verse 6.

(v.6) False Branches are Separated from the Vine – The fate of the apostate is to be *“taken away”* by the Father and Jesus spoke of the consequence of that in **John 15:6 - 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.* When people turn their backs on Jesus having once professed Him as their Savior, they are giving proof positive of unbelief in their hearts. There is no condition in Scripture under which unbelieving men and women can hope to be acceptable to God. Again, does this mean that the one who apostatizes has “lost” his faith? It cannot mean that, as we have discussed, but we can go so far as to say that such a person has lost *potential* salvation – salvation they might have enjoyed had he or she persevered unto true faith in Christ. What if such a person denies the faith and then later changes his mind? There is a long and old debate about such cases, but it is my conviction, and I believe it to be supported by both Scripture and church history, that the door to salvation remains open to anyone until God pulls the curtain down on life at their last breath.

There is one final question we ought to deal with tonight. Doesn’t God promise to keep us forever? Why, then, does He insist that we must be sure to abide, which here He is clearly commanding. What is the need if God is going to save us come what may? Let’s be clear: God does indeed keep

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all who trust in Him through Jesus His Son. But this is how He does that keeping. He reveals these things to us and our regenerate, Spirit-filled hearts say, “God forbid I should ever fall away! I’m sticking with Him no matter what!”

[APPLICATION] So, what are the lessons we can take away from these truths? What difference does it make that we know these things?

First of all, knowing that abiding in Christ is the source of any fruitfulness in our lives helps us enormously to turn our efforts at holiness in the right direction. If abiding in Him is the secret to fruitfulness, to a changed life that looks progressively like the character of Jesus, knowing this should help us to abandon our persistent, fleshly efforts to create our own righteousness. Stop working yourself to death trying to impress God! Just draw near to the vine and stay there. Fruitfulness will naturally follow, produced by the divine Vinedresser Himself. How do we invite this? Meditate on His word. Talk to Him in prayer. Obey His commandments. It’s not rocket science! Abide.

Secondly, realize that not everyone who claims to know Him, truly knows Him. This can help us in two ways. First, it explains much of what we see around us in professing Christianity. Some folks who call themselves Christians seem bound and determined to embarrass Christ and His Church at every turn in the road. While you and I can’t know with certainty who’s real and who’s not, it is still helpful to bear in mind that some of what goes on in Jesus’ name is sheer poppycock. Secondly, knowing this is a call to helpfulness in the Body of Christ. If some around us have yet to come to Christ, shouldn’t that encourage us to make doubly certain that everyone gets every help we can give them in perseverance? Perseverance is often the key to winning people to true faith. It happens all the time! People hang around church forever, and then one day they get saved. Let’s make it our business to help the ones we’re dubious about, hang in there. Lightning may yet strike, if it hasn’t already!

Finally, we need to insist on discussing the full truth of Scripture with everyone we know. It’s far too easy for us to assume that everyone who comes to church is a believer, and to water down our conversations and teachings. Maybe the old Russian proverb Ronald Reagan was so fond of should be kept at least in the back of our minds: “Trust but verify!”

**Conclusion:** One thing is certain and never need be doubted: Jesus is the true vine, the cornerstone, the strong foundation of all who are called by God to salvation. As we abide in that truth, we abide in Him. And as we abide in Him, His life in us will produce much fruit. Abide!