

## Thru the Bible Commentary

### JOHN 15:1-17

#### CHAPTER 15

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**THEME:** *Jesus is genuine Vine; disciples are branches*

This fifteenth chapter is a part of the Upper Room Discourse, although our Lord probably did not speak it in the Upper Room. At least the assumption is that He did not, because the last statement in chapter 14 is, “Arise, let us go hence.” Somewhere between the Upper Room and the Garden of Gethsemane our Lord spoke the words found in chapters 15 and 16, then prayed the prayer, recorded in chapter 17, as He entered the garden.

It has been the belief of many expositors that our Lord gave this chapter in a discourse down in the Valley of Kidron or on the side of the Mount of Olives, because we know that at that time there was a vineyard in that area which covered that valley. We also know that it was full moon because it was the time of the Passover. He may well have spoken these words as they walked through the vineyard. It would have been an appropriate place. Another suggestion has been made by several English expositors—and it is the one I accept—that that night He went by the temple, following the Law as He so meticulously did. The gates would have been open during the Passover nights. Those beautiful gates of the temple were actually a tourist attraction. They had been forged in Greece, floated across the Hellespont, then brought to Jerusalem, and placed in Herod’s temple there. The gates were made of bronze and wrought into them was a golden vine. That the vine symbolizes the nation Israel is apparent from the following verses: “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land” (Ps. 80:8–9). “Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill.... For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry” (Isa. 5:1, 7). “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me? (Jer. 2:21). “Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself ...” (Hos. 10:1). It is clear that the vine is a picture of the nation Israel.

Now, friend, our Lord is saying one of the most revolutionary things these men have ever heard. It sounds familiar to us today, but it was strange to their ears. Listen to Him.

## **JESUS IS GENUINE VINE; DISCIPLES ARE BRANCHES**

**I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman [John 15:1].**

The word for *true* here is *alethinos*, which means “genuine.” A thing can be true as over against error and falsehood, or a thing can be true over against that which is a counterfeit. The latter is the way it is used here. We have had this word used in the same way previously in the Gospel of John. John the Baptist was a reflecting light, but Jesus Christ is the *true* Light. Moses gave bread in the wilderness, but Jesus Christ is the *true* Bread. So here Jesus is saying, “I am the true vine, the genuine vine.”

These disciples had Jewish concepts and their thought patterns had been governed by the Old Testament. He is telling them now that the nation Israel is not the genuine vine. Their identification with the Jewish nation and the Jewish religion is not the essential thing. “I am the genuine vine.” The important thing now is for the disciples to be related to Jesus Christ. That was revolutionary!

Our Lord used a marvelous figure of speech, and He made it very clear that it is not your identification with a religion or a ceremony or an organization that is essential. We are to be identified with Christ! We are in Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit the moment we trust Christ as our Savior and are born again as a child of God.

“My Father is the husbandman.” This, too, is a startling word. In the Old Testament passages and in the parables, God is the owner of the vineyard. Here He is the keeper, the farmer, the One who takes care of the vineyard. Jesus is the genuine Vine, and the Father takes care of Him.

In the Old Testament it is prophesied that the Lord Jesus would grow up before Him as a tender plant and as a root out of the dry ground. Think how often the Father intervened to save Jesus from the Devil who wished to slay Him. The Father is the One who cared for the Vine, and He will care for the branches, too.

The branches must be joined to the Vine. For what purpose? For fruit-bearing. There are three words or phrases which are very important, and we will pick them up as we go along.

**Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit [John 15:2].**

“In me,” that is, in Christ, is what it means to be saved. There are tremendous words like propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption that cover particular phases of salvation, but the entire spectrum of salvation is in the phrase “in Christ.” There are only two groups of people: those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ. How do you get “in Christ”? By the new birth. When you trust Christ as Savior, you become a child of God through faith. You are born again by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit does something else: He not only indwells you, but He also baptizes you. That is what puts every believer into the body of Christ—“every branch in me.”

This passage is directed to believers, to those who are already in Christ. Jesus is not talking about *how* a person gets saved. He is not actually talking about salvation at all in this passage. Rather, He is talking about fruit-bearing, and that is the next word we wish to mark. Fruit is mentioned six times in the first ten verses. We will find as we go further that there are three degrees of fruit-bearing: fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. The whole theme here is fruit-bearing.

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” Where does He take it? He takes it away from the place of fruit-bearing.

Listen how He describes this in verse 6. (We will come to verses 3–5 later.)

**If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned [John 15:6].**

“Oh–oh,” somebody says, “that sounds as if you lose your salvation.” No, remember this passage is not talking about salvation but about fruit-bearing. It is talking about that which is the *result* of being saved.

First of all, what is the fruit? I do not believe that the fruit mentioned here refers to soul-winning, as so many people seem to think. I believe soul-winning is a by-product but not the fruit itself. The fruit is the fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...” (Gal. 5:22–23). This is fruit in the life of the believer. Abiding in Christ will produce effectual prayer, perpetual fruit, and celestial joy:

**If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you [John 15:7].**

That is prayer effectual.

**Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples [John 15:8].**

This is fruit perpetual.

**These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full [John 15:11].**

That is joy celestial.

If a person has such fruit in his life, he will be bringing men into the presence of God by his very life. That, of course, makes soul-winning a by-product.

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” He wants fruit in our lives. If a branch does not bear fruit, how does He take it away? One of the ways He removes it is by taking such a person away from the place of fruit-bearing. I know many who have been set aside today because they were no longer effective for God. There are ministers like that and there are lay people like that. Removing such a branch does not mean they lose their salvation, but they are taken away from the place of fruit-bearing.

Sometimes this removing from the place of fruit-bearing is by death, physical death. I believe this is what John means in 1 John 5:16 when he says that there is a sin unto death. A Christian can go on sinning until God will remove him from the place of fruit-bearing by

death. Ananias and Sapphira were removed by death from the early church, which was a holy church, a fruit-bearing church. These two liars could not stay in that church. I'm afraid they would be very comfortable in some of our churches today, but God would not permit them to remain in the early church.

"Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." The Greek word is *kathairo*, which means "to cleanse." Some people consider the purging to be pruning, and He does that too, but it really means to cleanse.

There is no doubt that the Lord does some pruning. He moves into our lives and takes out those things that offend, and sometimes it hurts. He removes things that are hindering us. I can speak to that subject and confess that it hurts. I think the Lord was pruning me when He permitted me to have a cancer and allowed it to stay in my body. He prunes out that which hinders our bearing fruit.

One of the reasons so many of God's children get hurt by this method of pruning is that they get so far from God, so far out of fellowship. The closer we are to God, the less it will hurt. I can remember playing hookey from school when I was a boy. We left our books at school and took off for the creek and went fishing. Although we didn't catch any fish, we had a lot of fun. We came in about the time school was out to get our books before going home so our parents wouldn't suspect that we had played hookey. The principal of the school figured we would do this, and when we walked into the room, he walked in right after us and said, "Boys, I'm glad to see you." We had to go to his office and wait while he got his switches. (We'd been through this before.) One of the fellows with me had been through this many times, and he gave me some of the best advice I've ever had. He said that when the principal started switching, we should move a step closer each time instead of backing off. The closer we were to him the less it would hurt. So the first time he hit me, instead of stepping back, I moved right in close to him, and I got so close I was where his fist was, and he wasn't hurting me at all. I have learned that is really good advice when the Lord chastens us also. Whom the Lord *loveth* he chasteneth. His chastening is not a sign that He is against us; He is trying to get fruit out of our lives. We tend to complain and move away from Him, but if we draw close to Him, it won't hurt nearly so much.

However, the "purging" in this verse literally means cleansing. When I was in the Bethlehem area, I saw that in their vineyards they let the grapevines grow on the ground, and they

propped them up with a rock. Because the grapes get dirty and pests get on them, they actually go around and wash the grapes before they get ripe. So the Lord comes to our lives; He lifts us up and washes us so that we may bear more fruit. How does He do this?

**Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you [John 15:3].**

“Ye are clean through the word.” The purging is accomplished by the Word of God. The cleansing power of the Word of God is a wonderful thing. We hear so much today about modern wash-day miracles, but I’ve never found them to be as miraculous as the claims made for them. The only true wash-day miracle is the cleansing power of the Word of God. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:22–23). We were born again by the Word of God, washed from our sins. Then in our walk down here we get dirty and need the Word of God to cleanse us continually. That is one reason to study the Bible—to be cleansed. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Ps. 119:9). There are light views among believers today that you can live any kind of life so long as you are fundamental in your belief of salvation by the grace of God. Believe me, God uses the Word of God to reveal to us when we are not walking according to His will. The real test which reveals whether a person is genuine in his relationship to God is whether he is studying the Word of God and whether he is letting it have its way in his life! God intends for us to be obedient to His Word.

“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word” (Ps. 119:67). “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Ps. 119:71). My friend, He uses affliction to bring us to the Word of God that you and I might be made serviceable to Him. I don’t think that you will ever be clean before God if you don’t study the Word of God. I believe that the people who are really dangerous are the ones who are as active as termites in our churches but who are reluctant to study the Word of God. I consider them the most dangerous element against the Word of God and the cause of Christ in this world. My friend, we need to study the Word of God and apply it to our lives.

**Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me [John 15:4].**

We have come to the third word I want you to mark, which is *abide*. To abide in Christ means constant communion with Him all the time. We have just talked of the cleansing power of the Word of God. That is a part of abiding. We must be cleansed daily. There is a story about Spurgeon who stopped in the middle of the street, removed his hat, and prayed. One of his deacons saw this and asked him about it. Mr. Spurgeon said that a cloud had come between him and his Lord and he wanted to remove it immediately; he had stopped to confess his sinful thought. We need to confess our sins to the Lord to abide in Him, to stay in constant communion with Him.

Also to abide in Him, we are to keep His commandments.

**If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.**

**Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you [John 15:10, 14].**

In our hymn books are songs like “Jesus Is a Friend of Mine” and “There’s not a Friend like the Lowly Jesus.” Friend, let me say this kindly. There is no lowly Jesus today but a glorified Christ at God’s right hand. Calling Jesus a friend of mine is sentimental and really wrong. If I would say that the President of the United States is my friend, I bring him down to my level. If he says that I am his friend, that is wonderful. Listen to what Jesus says. “Ye are my friend, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” We don’t need all this sentimental trash today. We need some honest heart-searching. Are we doing what Jesus has commanded us to do? Obedience is essential to abiding.

**As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love [John 15:9].**

Abiding is a continuing communion. That is the relationship of branch and vine. I have a 72’ x 123’ ranch here in California on which grow four avocado trees, three orange trees, and one tangerine tree. I have never had to say to the branches that they should abide in the tree or we wouldn’t have any fruit. I’ve never been up in the night to inspect them or come home unexpectedly and found the branches running around away from the tree. They abide and they bear fruit. You think I am being ridiculous. However, many Christians think they can live like the Devil all week and on Saturday night, then come in and serve the Lord on

Sunday. I happen to know because I tried that for years. My friend, we must be in constant communion with Him to bear fruit. That means when you wake in the morning, when you are at your desk in the office, when you are driving your car on the streets, you are abiding in constant communion.

**I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing [John 15:5].**

Because we have free will, we can break fellowship with God by allowing sin in our life, by stepping out of the will of God, or by worldliness. He wants us to abide so that we bring forth much fruit. You will notice here that there is a similarity to the parable of the sower. Remember that some of the seed fell on good ground and brought forth thirtyfold—that is fruit. Some of the seed brought forth sixty—that is more fruit. Some of the seed brought forth an hundredfold—that is much fruit. God wants us to bear much fruit.

**If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned [John 15:6].**

Let me say again that this is talking about our fruit-bearing, the product of our salvation. It is not talking about how we are to be saved. Paul uses another illustration for this same thing: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” (This is talking about the works of the believers, the fruit in the life of a believer. Fire will purify gold and silver and precious stones and draw off the dross. Wood, hay, and stubble will go up in smoke. That is the same as our verse which says the works will be cast into the fire and burned.) “If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:11–14). I believe that rewards will be given only for the fruit in our lives—and we don’t produce the fruit; *He* produces the fruit when we abide in Him.

A branch that is not abiding in Christ “is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” This is amplified by 1 Corinthians 3:15: “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself



shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” He may get to heaven smelling as if he had been bought at a fire sale, but he will not lose his salvation.

One of the saddest things is that today the average Christian believes that normal Christian living is failure. They think that bearing much fruit is entirely out of the question and are willing to live on a low plane hoping to produce just a little fruit. Remember that the Lord wants us to produce much fruit.

**If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.**

**Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples [John 15:7–8].**

This is a marvelous prayer promise, but notice the condition. “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you” means to be obedient to Him. Then we will have effectual prayer. The whole purpose of the abiding and of the praying is that the Father may have glory. This eliminates prayer for selfish reasons. The issue is fruit-bearing. God is glorified when we do bear fruit.

**As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.**

**If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.**

**These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full [John 15:9–11].**

The Lord wants us to have a good time. One of the fruits of the Spirit is to have joy in your life. I am mortally afraid of super-pious Christians who have no humor in their lives, yet walk around with a Bible under their arms. A fruit-bearing Christian will have a lot of fun in this life. There will be fun in going to a Bible study; there will be fun in serving the Lord. A life in fellowship with Christ is a joyous life.

**This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you [John 15:12].**

Remember He is talking to believers in this discourse. We are to love each other as He has loved us! It is sad to see Christians in our churches who tear down each other and gossip about one another. The Spirit of God is not working in such a situation. One can have Bible

teaching and still reject this commandment of our Lord. To love as He has loved us is putting it on a very high plane. Only the Spirit of God can produce such love in our lives.

**Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends [John 15:13].**

There is the test.

**Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you [John 15:14].**

The Christian life is not a hit-and-miss proposition. The Christian life is following His instructions, and the instructions are clear. If you follow these instructions, you will bear fruit. He laid down His life for us; He asks us to obey Him. He is our friend because He died for us. We are His friends when we keep His commandments.

He doesn't ask all of us to die for Him. Someone once asked Dwight L. Moody whether he had "dying grace." Mr. Moody replied that he didn't have it, but when He needed it, the Lord would give it to him. And He did.

**Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.**

**Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you [John 15:15–16].**

We are the friends of Jesus if we do whatsoever He has commanded us. Now He tells us that He has opened up His heart to us. God wants to reveal Himself to us. Remember how He searched out Abraham to reveal His plan to him because Abraham was His friend. Now Jesus tells us that He has revealed the things of God to us. That is what a friend does. How many people can you go to and open up your heart? One of the things that should characterize a believer is that you could go to him and tell him your problems and get understanding and help and encouragement from him. This is how we are to love one another.

Now, notice, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” A great many people do not like the doctrine of election, but it is wonderful and practical. Many a discouraged Christian has cast himself on the Lord saying, “Lord, you called me and chose me and I’m your child.” Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said, “He chose me; therefore I am His responsibility.” That is trust! This little crowd of disciples is going to scatter in a few hours. The Shepherd will be crucified, and the sheep will scatter. At such an hour Jesus tells them, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.”

A preacher, who had been converted late in life, had been guilty of stealing before he was saved. After he had just started preaching about His Savior and was still a new Christian, he passed a hen house on his way home from church one night. It was a great temptation for him, but he stopped and prayed, “Lord, your property is in danger, and I don’t mean the chickens.” It is wonderful to call upon the Lord like that.

His great purpose is that we should produce fruit, not just passing fruit, but fruit that will remain. It must all be in His will. If we abide in Him, then we can ask in His name. Answers to our prayers are a pretty good barometer of our spirituality.

He climaxes this section on fruit-bearing by mentioning again that we should love one another.

**These things I command you, that ye love one another [John 15:17].**

This should be the relationship of believers. There is also a relationship with the world, and now He goes into that subject.

**If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> J. Vernon McGee, [\*Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels \(John 11-21\)\*](#), electronic ed., vol. 39 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 89–101.