

John 15: Jesus’ “Viability” Theology

The (Enhanced) Paradigm of Viability

John 15.5-8

“I am the vine; you are the branches.
If you remain in me and I in you,
you will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing.

⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Jesus' (Repeated) Principle of Viability

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me"

JOHN 15.4

- ❖ It is obvious that Jesus is reiterating what he has already said, and yet, he is not simply repeating himself for there are enhanced aspects to his principle of viability. Jesus has spoken of fruit, then pruning that bears “more” fruit; now he speaks of “much” fruit. Within this context of much fruit, he also makes another “anything you ask” promise. Then he points to the ultimate outcome for bearing fruit: the Father is glorified when we bear much fruit as proof that we are true disciples, abiding and living in the life of the Son who lived to reveal and glorify the Father.

“I am the vine; you are the branches.

I am the True Vine, and my Father is the Gardener. (v. 1)

If you remain in me and I in you,

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. (v. 4a)

you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (v. 4b)

⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit . . . (v. 2a)

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

... while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (v. 2b)

❖ In our mentality and behavior, we live so detached and disconnected from the meaning of “on earth as it is in heaven”—as though it is an abstract or theoretical statement that we must appropriately affirm but which has no real life application. We fail to grasp that this was the life Christ lived while here on earth—

“Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”

JOHN 10.38

“Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.”

JOHN 14.10-11

- ❖ Jesus' works were the evidence (fruit) of the viability of his relationship with the Father—*in the Father and the Father in him*. It is through Jesus that the Father's voice is heard on earth; it is through Jesus that the Father's character and ways are revealed on earth.

“For I did not speak on my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.”

JOHN 10.49

- ❖ This principle continues through Jesus to us, his disciples—

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

JOHN 14.20-21

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

JOHN 15.10

- ❖ “*On earth as it is in heaven*” was the measure of Jesus’ life and ministry, now applied to us as a foundational discipleship principle. Jesus’ statement in chapter 14: “*it is the Father [in heaven] living in me doing his work [on earth]*” will become, as he applies it to his disciples in chapter 15, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*”
- ❖ For a second time Jesus is emphasizing the paradigm we saw in our previous study, *The Heart of Viability*—

In order to fulfill his mission as Revealer, Jesus humbled himself and lived in *absolute union* with the Father. It was only in this way that the will of heaven could be made known on earth. As disciples, we must comprehend this prevailing paradigm of Jesus, for it determines our viability as followers of Jesus Christ and our ability to reveal him to this world with an effectiveness that authenticates our faith and glorifies the Father.

Abiding is Non-Optional!

“If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit . . .

JOHN 15.2

❖ Previous Jesus said that his Father, the True Caretaker, cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit. Now he emphasizes the volitional relationship that the branch must enter into and the consequences of failing to do so—

- (1) Fruit is the result of abiding (remaining) in the vine—no abiding, no fruit.
- (2) Fruitless branches are have no purpose; they are cut off.
- (3) Non-abiding branches have no life, no sufficiency, no worth in and of themselves. They are withered, fruitless, and worthless.

- ❖ These little words “*if*” and “*in*” speak volumes; we must choose to abide; we must cultivate a life of abiding in Christ. Many Christians seem to think that they can choose how they will remain in Christ or the level of abiding that is suitable to them. The word “remain” (Gr: *meno*; “abide” KJV) means *to abide, to be in close and settled union*. Surrender, fellowship, attentiveness, obedience, love, prayer, “every word that comes from the mouth of God”—these were the characteristics of Jesus’ union with the Father.
- ❖ Abiding and bearing fruit is not the result of a set of action steps. It is the outcome of a “life-union” between the Vine and the branch:
 - ▶ “*If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*”
 - ▶ “*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*”

—an extension of the same principle of life-union that was operable in Jesus:

 - ▶ “*... it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.*”
 - ▶ “*On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.*”

- ❖ As we have previously seen, we as branches of a wild tree have been “grafted” into the True Vine (Romans 11.17-24). In horticulture—

“graft is the joining together of plant parts by means of tissue regeneration. The basic technique in grafting consists of placing cambial tissues of stock and scion in intimate association, so that the resulting callus tissue produced from stock and scion interlocks to form a living continuous connection.”

Through the work of the Holy Spirit we have been brought into intimate relationship with Christ; we have been made spiritually alive (responsive) in Christ and brought into a union with him where we experience the effect of his life within us—

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (ROMANS 6.4)

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. (EPHESIANS 3.16-17)

- ❖ Abiding in Christ, then, is natural outcome of the Spirit-ual life within us, drawing us to Christ in intimate relationship—giving us the desire to be like him (eg. love, humility, obedience, the fruit of the Spirit); it is a willing surrender to the Father's pruning for the result of a harvest of righteousness and peace; it is responding to the desire and work of the Spirit to teach us about Christ; it is longing for him as a bride longs for her bridegroom.

Abiding in the Vine then comes to be nothing more nor less than the restful surrender of the soul to let Christ have all and work all, as completely as in nature the branch knows and seeks nothing but the vine.

—Andrew Murray

- ❖ Jesus said that there are only two outcomes for the branch: fruit or fire. Many Christians are withered branches, with a reputation of being alive, but in reality, are dead. If you are in Christ, you have an infinite life-giving union. Don't neglect it!