

John 15: Jesus' "Viability" Theology

The Heart of Viability

John 15

⁴ 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. ⁵ '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.

¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.

Little Words; Critical Principles

“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.”

“. . . 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 . . .”

JOHN 14.10-11

- ❖ Throughout chapter 14, Jesus emphasized the Father: he began by describing his Father’s house, and ended by saying that *“I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”* He emphasized to his disciples that he was, as John said in his prologue (P¹⁸), the visible representation of the Father (14.9) and that to know him was to know the Father (14.7). Jesus emphasized that he did not speak on his own authority (14.10), that it was the Father living in him, doing the works that were the proof that *“I am in the Father and the Father is in me”* (14.11).

- ❖ In chapter 15, Jesus will extend this principle to the relationship of his disciples with him and to their ability to give evidence that he is in them—

“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. 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. 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. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (15.4-8)

- ❖ In Jesus’ theology, little words are the hinge on which eternal truths and principles become viable in the lives of his disciples here on earth. In chapter 14, the Father (and his relationship to the Father) was Jesus’ focus; in chapter 15, it is him and his disciples. Jesus addressed himself (*I, me, my*) 55 times and his disciples (*you*) 46 times. He used the word “in” 17 times and the word “if” 11 times.

❖ As we saw in chapter 14, Jesus' "in" theology is at the heart of his identity and purpose: ". . . 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 . . ." A relationship of indivisible union and infinite mutuality characterize Jesus, *God-the-Son-One-and-Only* (P^{14, 18}) and the Father, *God-Whom-No-One-Has-Seen* (P¹⁸). In Jesus, *God-the-Word-Made-Flesh*, the Father is both revealed and expressed—with a revelation that is infinitely complete ("*glory . . . full of*") in truth, grace, life, judgment (cf. John 5.19-30). Jesus speaks for the Father and the Father executes His explicit will and purposes through the Son (14.10c). Since Jesus has come to make the Father known, he speaks only what the Father commands him to say, he does only what the Father tells him to do, and this not only guarantees absolutely accurate revelation of heaven to earth, i.e., "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,*" but also reveals the love that he has for the Father.

- ❖ The disciples now need to understand what you and I must also understand: these same principles, absolutely and unalterably, apply to every disciple's relationship with Jesus.
 - ▶ The statement in chapter 14: *"it is the Father living in me doing his work"* will become, 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."*
 - ▶ The principle embodied in, *"so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me"* will be applied to the disciples as well:
"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 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. . . . You are my friends if you do what I command."
- ❖ As disciples, we must understand that *"on earth as it is in heaven"* is not an abstract phrase in a prayer, but a discipleship principle.

❖ Earlier in the evening, Jesus had set for them an example as their Master that they must give themselves in selfless service to one another—

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (13.14-16)

Now he will remind them of what he had told them and extend that principle to their association with and representation of him in the world—

Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (15.10)

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. (15.26-27)

Jesus' Prevailing Paradigm

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 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."

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

JOHN 6.56-57

- ❖ 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: *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*