

John 15: Jesus' “Viability” Theology

The Paradigm of Viability: The Gardener (2)

John 15.1-4

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

² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes
so that it will be even more fruitful.

³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

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.

The True Husbandman & The Worthless Vine

“I am the True Vine, and my Father is the True Husbandman.”

“What more could have been done for My vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?” . . . The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines He delighted in. And He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

ISAIAH 5.4, 7

- ❖ The LORD God, as the True Husbandman, had made a covenant of love with Israel; they, however, broke covenant with Him (Ezekiel 16.32; Hosea 2.2, 4-5), exchanging Him who was their Glory (Jeremiah 2.11; Hosea 4.7) for that which was worthless. Thus, Israel became a vine incapable of producing fruit that revealed the character and intent of the True Husbandman (Isaiah 5.2; Jeremiah 13.23; Hosea 10.13; Amos 6.12).

The Work of the Gardener

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

ROMANS 11.22

- ❖ In his paradigm of “discipleship viability,” Jesus presents himself as the True Vine, in contrast to Israel, the choice vine which produced only bad fruit (Isaiah 5.1-2). His Father, the True Husbandman (NIV: *gardener*; ESV: *vinedresser*), who had planted the choice vine, has replaced it with the True Vine into which he has grafted branches (Gentiles) that were not originally part of the choice vine, but who by faith, are now “in” and nourished by the True Vine (Romans 11.17-20a). That status, however, the Apostle Paul warned, is not something to be taken for granted (Romans 11.20b-21).

- ❖ The purpose of every vine is to produce fruit—not merely foliage. The branches belong to the vine for the purpose of revealing and producing the life (fruit) that is in the vine. Israel lived as a vine unto themselves, without regard for the character and intent of their True Husbandman who had planted them with the expectation of good fruit (Isiah 5.7). They abandoned the One who was their source of life (Jeremiah 2.11-13), and thus, could produce only corrupt fruit (Jeremiah 2.20-21).
- ❖ It is with this background as part of the history of Israel that Jesus tells his disciples whom he has chosen (13.18a; 15.16), cleansed (13.10; 15.3) and brought as branches into his life as the True Vine (v. 5)—

“[My Father, the True Husbandman] cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”
- ❖ The work of his Father, the True Husbandman, Jesus tells us, is to examine the branches and determine one of two courses of action: cut off or cut back.

- ❖ What did Jesus mean: “He cuts off every branch *in me* that bears no fruit?” Commentators disagree on the interpretation of Jesus’ words; nevertheless, it is very sobering to hear him say that a branch that is “explicitly “*in*” the root and trunk” can be cut off. Jesus reinforces this statement when he further declares—

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.

JOHN 15.6

- ❖ The Apostle Paul has reminded us that our position in the Vine is not something that we take for granted. The writer to the Hebrews graphically warns us that fruitlessness is fatal—

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

HEBREWS 6.7-8

- ❖ The purpose of cutting back is to produce more fruit, and although it seems counterproductive, every vinedresser knows that a plant must be managed or it will take on a life of its own (as did Israel), producing offshoots that are unproductive. The writer to the Hebrews emphasized the same principle when he wrote—

[Our human fathers] disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

HEBREWS 12.10-11

James opened his letter by encouraging his readers —

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

JAMES 1.2-4

The Principle of Viability

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.

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 3.10-11

- ❖ Nothing makes anything more worthless and unviable than for it to lose its purpose—
“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” (Luke 14.34-35)
- ❖ Apart from Christ, we have no viability whatsoever. None. But in him, the True Vine, we have abundant life. Continued viability, however, depends on our surrender to the Father’s work of loving pruning and on deeply abiding in the True Vine.