

Relating to the True Vine

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The Vine/Branch Relationship

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 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. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. 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. 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."

"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. 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. 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. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:1-14).

Introduction

There are three main elements to the example Jesus used in the above verses. Those elements are the Vine, the branches and the Husbandman or Vinedresser. Jesus has clearly defined each of these for us and we are not left in the dark as to what they represent: Jesus is the True Vine, we as believers are the branches and the Father is the Vinedresser. It is our task in this book to more clearly scrutinize these names in and effort to discover how we may better capture their meaning and in so doing, set our lives on a course of relating according to them. Only true believers are contemplated in John chapter fifteen. The branches have passed from death unto life in Christ because of living union. Read carefully the words of Jesus in the opening verses of John chapter fifteen. These words apply only to the disciples as they walked through the vineyard toward the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. In a few hours and Jesus will be arrested and crucified. What would a dying man tell His best friends? Here are His words to genuine believers, instructing, admonishing, warning and encouraging them.

The Importance Of The True Vine

The most important consideration in these scriptures pertains to the word "Vine." If there was no Vine there would be no truth concerning abiding. If we do not understand the place of the Vine in this, how will we ever understand our place as branches? Therefore it is imperative that we have a clear cut understanding and definition of what Jesus means when He calls Himself the True Vine. The truth of abiding in the Vine will be absolutely meaningless if we have not comprehended what it is that we are abiding in.

Jesus is the true Vine. If Jesus is the TRUE Vine it must mean that there are other false vines. The Old Testament mentions Israel being as a wild vine. Jesus said "and every plant that my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." We are not to be a vine. Jesus says that we are the branches. As such, we are to proceed forth from the Vine.

To know the meaning and reality of what the term "vine" represents, we must move past mere thought and study. To study the subject may help prepare your heart but it cannot show you the Vine. To truly know this relationship you must bow your heart and wait on the Holy Spirit to reveal the Vine. He does not just teach you truths concerning earthly vines. He opens the heart to see God's concept and you receive Him as the Vine Himself. Even though man may be able to present the proper concepts, only the Spirit of Truth introduces you to the Vine Himself.

However, Jesus gives us the meaning of His usage of the word "vine" as applied to Himself. Jesus as the Vine, is the Source, not just of blessings but the source of Life for the branches. Before there were branches, there was the Vine. Jesus was full and complete. He had need of nothing but dwelt in all fullness. The only purpose for Jesus joining to us as branches is for our sakes. Through that union, we become partakers of the divine nature (I Peter ???). The sap or life within the Vine is to become the same exact life that the branches are supposed to live by. He is the one and only life that the branches are to have in possession. Let me make this clear: the same life that Jesus lives by is the life that He and the Vinedresser expects every branch to live by. How can this be made any plainer than by such verses as Galatians 2:20 where the apostle Paul says "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, CHRIST LIVETH IN ME."

We will discover this in greater detail later but the central focus pertaining to abiding is the need for Christians to consciously abide in Christ as the life that we live and function by. Therefore, there is no work, ministry or action a "branch can take to fulfill what God wants apart from "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). For a Christian, Jesus may be the only source of salvation but, for a branch, Jesus is the only source of life they have.

However, before we move on let me make this plain: Jesus as the Vine is not just a life giver. He is the very life of every branch. The branch and the Vine share one life and it is not our life. His own life is meant to flow into us and then out of us in the form of fruit. If we are living OUR LIFE FOR Christ, then we have still failed as branches. The whole reason Jesus is relating this example of Vine and branches is so that we might grasp His

intention to not simply save us but to also inhabit us. When we become open to the thought that Jesus inhabiting us is more than Him being in us while we live for Him, then we are ready to discover the full meaning of what it is to be a branch.

There is a distinction between the Vine outwardly and the Life of the Vine that sustains and invigorates each branch. The Vine is the external part but what we need is what is deep inside the Vine – His life and nature. The only way to get "that" part of the Vine in us is to abide in Him.

Defining The Branch

We have seen the importance of the Vine and now it is needed for us to find the place of the branch. When we refer to individuals of the Body of Christ we usually refers to ourselves as Christians. However, where did that term come from? If you read in Acts ??, you will discover that unconverted people came up with the name. It was derived from people who had no spiritual insight but who could only look on the outward appearance. Therefore, "Christians" became equated with certain outward expressions of life such as Bible reading, praying, etc. But Jesus never refers to us as Christians. It is man that looks on the outward but God view from the internal life. Instead of calling us Christians, Jesus calls us branches. What does that mean? It means that, He doesn't equate us so much with the externals of Christianity as much as what we are like on the inside. The adherents to most every religion pray, attend gatherings and read the literature specific to their beliefs. But the Vine has one criteria for discovering whether we are what we are supposed to be: Is the same life of the Vine the life that the branch is living?

The branch can easily be defined – he is a conduit for the life of Jesus Christ. Being a branch has nothing to do with externals except as a means for the life of the Vine to express Himself in terms of His own fruit. Any "work" of abiding on the part of the branch is simply the continuous act of allowing Vine Life to fill him. The expectation of both the Vine and the Vinedresser is for the branches to function in such a way that it is the Vine that is seen through the branch through expressions called fruit. Once we discover that the Vinedresser is determined to have each branch filled with Vine Life, then we become open to a new relationship with Jesus beyond that of Redeemer/sinner, Lord/servant and other such relationships and become ready to move into a whole new realm or relating that involves the Vine and ourselves as branches.

The people who are spoken of here as "branches" are truly and not just doctrinally "in Christ". A Bank that is a branch office is just an extension of the main Bank. You are a branch because you are "branches" of the Vine. Nothing else makes you a branch.

The Vine/Branch Relationship

The juice that is the sap is the same in the branch as it is in the Vine. Both partake of the same nature and life. The branch may be smaller in size than the Vine so they may not have as much fullness. Neither are the branches connected directly to the root; but they are partakers, both of the root and fatness of the Vine.

But though the juice of the sap is the same, it goes through a wondrous transformation within the fruit. Inside the grape, a sweetness is formed. This sweetness is a result of the union between Vine and branch. It is similar to the sweetness of a child, which result from the union of a man and wife. It is this juice from the grape that the Vinedresser ultimately wants. It is outside our purpose for this particular book but the juice goes through a rigorous process in order to bring forth the new wine which will bring joy and gladness to the Master.

To understand our relationship to Jesus as the Vine is simply to see Him as a connecting station from where we get all life. As branches we are to function as a tapping devise that is connected into the Vine which draws out of the great "I Am" and places His fullness into us. It is a realization that He is the Vine. As such, He is the source of all things. The Vine becomes our source of direction, understanding, encouragement, delight, and sustenance.

"I am the Vine, you are the branches," is vitally important for us to understand and accept as our life-style. We need to figure each persons place in this plan. Jesus is the Vine, the Father is the Vinedresser, and you and I are branches. We need to quit trying to be pleasing in ourselves and seek to bring forth more of Christ so the Father may be glorified. The Vine provides the life, the strength, the fruit, the resources.

Christ in you. There is spiritual treasure hidden in your earth. "Be ye holy for I am Holy." is to challenge you to the possibilities of Christ WITHIN. It is not said in order to stir you to feverish work.

It is the expressed image not just some doctrinal image of Christ held in your mind. The Life is manifested in the outward place. Life on this plane becomes nothing more than expressing THE LIVING Christ and not just ministering FOR Him.

Consider the flowers - they do not fail to blossom. There is inward life. This is not just an example of God's care but His care provided by His means - life within. But it is not just "something" being worked in you, it is God that worketh in you. The goal is outflow from the central Life of the Vine. Life upsprings in you. The process God has chosen is not that of just breaking out in the earth one day with great miracles and blessings, but through a secret, inner flow of sap coming from the tree into EVERY BRANCH knowing that ONE DAY this "first cause" will break out into glorious fruit. This is the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Victory over the carnal mind comes when ancient creeds are finally broken and new Life floods the branch. Too many embrace their chains and forego Life. They still wait for Jesus to show them the way and have never made the great discovery that HE IS THE WAY. A branch does not sit in a class room and study The Way. To the branch, the Vine is the ONLY way. We don't think right thoughts, We are to become a channel for the one and only mind. This mind feeds off of the highest source partaking of the real bread.

These words were spoken to the twelve just before Jesus' death and resurrection. Later we here John alluding to them when he says, "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." (I John 2:6). We understand by the Lord's words that they imply a walk in newness of Life – Christ's life.

John tells us that "abiding in Him" will lead to a "walk even as He walked" (I John 2:6). Our goal is not to find out how He walked and copy it. That does not require abiding. Jesus' walk was not His own. The Father gave the words and did the works. He abode in the Father and even said so.

We may know the doctrines of Christianity; we may rightly hold the great essential truths of our faith, but, as one has said, "no amount of knowledge however correct, no amount of intelligence, however exact, will ever put upon your soul the impress of the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ."

John said that, "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not" (I John 3:6). From the preceding verses we learn what the Spirit of God means by sin, for we read, in verse 4, "sin is lawlessness." The essence of sin is doing one's own will without reference to God or man. The world around is increasingly marked by lawlessness- everyone doing that which is right in his own eyes. How then are we to escape the evil principle of lawlessness, or self-will? Only by abiding in Christ; for the Apostle says, "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not."

To escape self-will we must escape self. By abiding in Christ we escape our lives and become a channel of His. If we abide in Him, our lives would bear the fruit of selflessness demonstrated in His character. "Abide in Me... for without Me ye can do nothing." We may be gifted and have all knowledge, and zeal, we may have long experience, but it still remains nothing if it is not Him within us. There is no power to overcome self – there is only the Cross and the Life of Christ.

The Lord tells us, that, abiding in Christ our prayers will have an answer. This means we are not praying our mind but His. It is not simply that our prayers are in accord with His but our prayers are His.

The Truth Of Abiding

In verse four, the truth of "abiding" is brought forth. He says "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." The "He" that is spoken of here is not just the Vine in terms of the external, but the Life within.

Believer are never told be "in Christ" because they are *in* Christ by the spiritual birth. However, we are told to "remain in Him," or to "abide in Christ" because this is meant to be experiential and actual not just theoretical.

Our part is to abide in the Vine. Abiding is not in reference to some act that brings about redemption but that which takes place after redemption. We are not considered to be branches until we have been joined to Him first.

Abiding, in the Greek, means "to stay fastened in a given place, state, or relation, and continue there." So to "abide" involves a place, a state and a relationship that must be maintained. It is a spiritual connection.

Every time you see these words translated "to abide," "remain," "dwell," or "continue" the idea is to draw from the actual life and resources that His nature provides. It is to sustain a continuous life flow from Him. To abide in Christ involves the constant reliance upon the Living Vine to produce anything in you. It is a dependency of the branch upon the Vine for all that it will produce. It involves the circulation of His life throughout our own being.

Jesus said, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:56). This is painting the same picture as that of the Vine and branch. Jesus must enter into us as does the food we eat and drink. Nothing else sustains us. We will faint and fail without Him AS OUR SUSTAINENCE. We appropriate His power if we are to produce anything for the Vine and its branches express a common life.

Since "abiding" is a spiritual state, it has nothing to do with going to church, giving money, or ministry. Abiding may result in these things and more but they, in themselves, have absolutely nothing to do with abiding initially. It involves remaining in a place of reality that God holds. It also involves fellowshiping with the Lord in that union and oneness. Just as a branch must draw its strength, nourishment and very life through the Vine that it is growing on, even so, we have such a union with Jesus. Obviously we have a relationship with the Husbandman but it is quite different than what we have with the Vine. We are One with the Vine but are "tended" by the Husbandman.

Abiding in the Vine is something that we have to do. We have to cultivate a mindset of being one with Jesus and allow His Life to flow through us. This does not happen automatically, hence the exhortation by Jesus to "abide."

Christian people do all kinds of things but it is not always the result of His life. No matter how good it is, we must not do it but let Jesus be the Source. When the Vine is no longer the source we are no longer bringing forth His fruit. As long as we assume we are bringing forth fruit we will not display any particular concern toward checking ourselves to see if we are "abiding." It is only when we have a clear understanding of what "fruit" is that we can evaluate what it pertains to and if we are bringing forth the right thing.

Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branch, without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). How much can a branch do without the vine? Nothing!! It does not choose what fruit to bear, how much to bear, nor when to bear it. It can do nothing but abide in the vine. How much can a branch do with the vine helping it? Nothing!! The branch does nothing but abide in the vine. The vine does everything. The life is in the vine, it brings life from the ground, through the vine, thence to the branch, and then the fruit appears on the branch. All this happens because of the vine, nothing of the branch. The branch just becomes the conveyor.

What Is Growth? -- Filling All Things

To truly relate to Jesus as the Vine will require many changes in how we define certain words. One of those words is "growth." When we just consider ourselves as an independent "Christian" responsible for our own growth then our view of growth becomes distorted. But if we are in union with Him in the same manner as a branch would be with a vine, then growth becomes something all together different. Then growth is seen in terms of Vine life filling us and Him bringing forth His fruit out of us. We are to "grow up into Him in all things," so that "in all things He might have the pre-eminence." The goal is that Christ become all and in all so that He might "fill all things." We become the "fullness of Him that filleth all in all" because we are full of Him.

The definition for "growth" held by most of us involves us becoming more spiritual. That kind of growth doesn't require Jesus at all except as the facilitator. But it is foolishness to seek growth apart from Jesus, the Vine. It is presumptuous to try to bring forth fruit without Christ. Would you try to fly without a plane? Or would you attempt to eat without food? You cannot do better than Christ! You cannot improve on what Jesus Christ has done and what the believer has received of Him as the Vine. But remember, growth outwardly is based on how deeply our roots go down. Most are attempting to discover the "root of the problem" instead of Christ and His roots.

The real proof of spiritual growth is unrelated to amount of church attendance, or how much scripture you have memorized. The test of spiritual growth lies in how much of the Vine you allow to fill you. Do you allow Jesus to fill all things in you, instead of just embracing the doctrine of it?

To grow spiritually has absolutely nothing to do with you getting better or more spiritual – it has everything to do with Christ being formed in you. What is your *one* priority in life? Is it to get better or decrease and for Christ to increase (John 3:30)? The goal is not to make ourselves available to Him but to be made unavailable. The only way the Vine

wants you to be available is as a channel for His Life and resources through you. To abide, or remain in Christ, is something you must do in deference to your own strength, wisdom and abilities. We must decide to not do things and allow Christ to be the source. "All my springs are in thee." We have already been placed in Christ but now we must choose to draw from there as our way of life. Jesus is not just your nourisher, you must stay connected to Him as your everything. The Vine is the life of the believer. The quality of your fruit relates to what is the source of it, not how good it looks to us or others. All of our righteousness is still as filthy rags.

But growth in us is demanded also. We need to expand in order that more of Christ may fill us. One coming to live by Christ and not senses lives by the New Man Body. He has burst the old bottles (MT. 9:17). The new wine of life cries out for space and freedom. Just as the sap pushes into the branch and demands it grow so that more sap may be within and the branch may be able to bear more fruit without breaking.

The Concept Of Root And Fatness

If we are going to have a relationship with Jesus as the Vine then that means we must make Him the Source. He is the One with the roots. We must acknowledge that the only valid method of fruitfulness is through the Vine. If we do not do so, we may resort to other vines and other roots. Failure to tap into the Vine life may open us to tapping into bitter roots. If, at any juncture, we are aware of "bitter roots" we must acknowledge that they come from a source other than the Vine. So before anything else, there must come a deep seated realization that only Jesus is the TRUE Vine and that we will not avail ourselves of other resources. This must not just be a theological stance but a relationship. Are your roots in Jesus Christ alone?

We should not seek a different means of fruitfulness or source or element by which to grow than that Christ. Everything considered by God to be true fruit arises out of the root which is Christ. Any attempt to bring forth apart from His root and fatness is vanity, regardless of how good it appears to man., or else it is spurious growth. We must embrace this concept as true, even if we are condemned by it.

Since He is the Vine and we are His branches, all that He is is available to us as we acknowledge "Vine/branch union." We can partake of Christ and His fullness because we have no roots or fatness apart from Him. In Colossians 2:6-7 it talks about being rooted in Him. In Verse 7 "Having been firmly rooted" is used in a specific grammatical tense. It refers to a "foundation which is forever laid, never to be repeated, never to be found inadequate". The meaning is that we did not grow these roots, but we have full access to them. Everything in spiritual growth relates back to its roots. Without roots, the branch cannot live. The problem lies in the fact that, a branch does not have its own roots. The lifeline of the branch requires that it stay firmly connect to the Vine who has roots.

Now, if you were truly plugged into Jesus as the Vine and understand that all His root and fatness is yours, then why would you spend time praying for the things that are "freely given us of God"? So many spend their time hoping for what is already declared

to be theirs. (Put here the truth of "Ye And Amen") They do this because they have not rightly comprehended the Vine/branch relationship. All that is available to us through the Vine will do us no good until we accept this union.

What Is Fruit?

Do you want to bear "much fruit"? Jesus said some don't bear fruit, others bear some fruit but what the Vinedresser really wants is "much fruit". How does that come about? Jesus told us very specifically how to do that. The Vine said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (v. 5).

Fruit is not good works, successful ministry or any such thing. Very simply, fruit is that which comes forth as a result of the Vine life within us. If this is a true definition, then the definition of what a withered branch is, is one that produces little or nothing from the Vine as its source. A branch can be very "leafy" and busy (bushy) but be bearing very little as a result of His life within. If you look at the outward, a branch may appear very healthy but in reality it is a withered branch because the apparent successful results you see are not the result of Life but of zeal and effort. Therefore, even our definition of what it means to be "withered" must come from God and not be based on any worldly views of success. A healthy branch has Christ flowing through him. A fruitful branch has Christ flowing out of him as his source of fruitfulness. Therefore, the biggest danger to the branch is to become separate from the Vine. Separation from the Vine sounds serious enough but what exactly does that involve? Separation from the Vine involves three main aspects: loss of rest, lack of fruit bearing, and eventually loss of Life.

There is only one way to produce fruit. It must come as a result of the Vine dwelling in us. That involves more than just being like a servant that obeys its master. This is not just obedience to His orders but obedient to His Life within. It is God at work in you both to will and do of His good pleasure. It is not just a matter of somehow gaining enough strength or obedience to bring forth fruit. It is not us at all. What we produce in our own ingenuity and power falls to the ground and rots. It does not glorify Jesus. God's ways are not our ways.

Bearing Fruit And Rest

Fruit bearing and abiding should not involve striving. It is the branch's place simply to bear the fruit. But it must be clear: We do not produce the fruit, we only bear it. His life produces the fruit through us. To grasp this is the beginning of grasping abiding. To be placed in the Vine is to be put in a place of rest. There is no striving done in order to produce fruit, there is only the constant realization of the flow of His life within you. To cease to abide is to cease to continue in the place of rest.

If, in your relationship with Jesus, you leave Him as your source and move to a place of striving and self-effort, you begin to change. Remember that leaving the Vine for any reason cuts you off from His Life within you. Of course, His life is still within you but

you cease to relate to Jesus as Vine and Source. To move into striving is to move into self as source. Your outlook, your attitude, your patience, everything begins to change. Once we notice these "symptoms", we usually set out on a course to correct these symptomatic areas. We may assume these new "fruits" are the result of adverse circumstance or some attack of the devil, when in reality, we have simply left our Sabbath. We are no longer abiding in the Vine.

Failure to abide in the Vine, is failure to maintain an open channel of life between you and the Lord. It's not a prayer problem; it's a life problem; it's a relationship problem. You are no longer relating to Him as the Vine.

Jesus states in verse 12, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." Love is a good measuring rod of if we are abiding or striving. It's not our fruit but the fruit of the Spirit – love. The practical reason for abiding in the Vine is that you bear fruit. And herein is the Father glorified that we bear much fruit. Unless we abide in the Vine we cannot possibly bear fruit.

Separation And Fruit Bearing

I keep observing a shallow barrenness in the lives of many Christians. That barrenness is from failure to maintain a vital union with the life of Christ. Lack of fruit bearing is the result of not abiding in the Vine. We have already stated that fruit is that which comes forth as a result of the Vine life within us. His goal is not just some sort of ethereal spiritual connection to Jesus called "vine connection." In our minds that connection "just is" and continues without consciousness of it. But His goal is to have His Life IN YOU in such a way that what comes out of you is the result of Him who is in you.

The Husbandman doesn't just want fruit but fruit that remains. One result of abiding in the Vine is fruit that abides also. Only Christ's fruit will remain. Do you draw daily from the spiritual life of the Vine? The branch, that continues abiding in the Vine, is drawing its life from the One who produces fruit and the fruit, which Jesus produces, does remain. The Lord makes this clear in verse 16, "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."

Separation From Life

But leaving the Vine involves greater issues than just leaving our place of rest or not bringing forth fruit. Israel failed to enter into rest with the end result that they slowly dried up and then died in the wilderness. It must be understood that leaving the Vine means to leave Life.

So fruit bearing is not the very first concern. God, the Husbandman's main concern is that Life continues to flow in the branches. We usually think in terms of whether we are producing good or evil. Our goal then becomes the eradication of evil in our lives. The farmer can easily spray for bugs, which come to us from the outside, but He cannot easily

put life back into a dead branch. When we cease to abide the result is separation; just the opposite of union. And separation starts the process toward death. The early and mid stages of not abiding cause us to wither. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered."

So failure to abide results in a separation from the Vine. To me, it doesn't matter if it is to hell or around the block – I don't want to be separated from Jesus. We begin to wither and withering results in bondage. A lack of Life manifests as a lack of joy, liberty, and fellowship.

God does not want us separated from Him. To do so results in unrest, lack of fruit and dead works for us. While we may hate unrest and such like, God hates us to be separated from Him.

There is more than one way to separate from life than simply backsliding. When we press out the life of Christ in us by wanting our own agenda, we begin to be separated from life. Many Christians live their lives with the attitude that God will help us win and gain everything we want on our own terms. It will never produce the fruit that is pleasing to God. We approach Him with our agendas and expect abundant spiritual life. It doesn't work that way. God blesses that which is done His way, not our way. The truth is God never blesses us on our terms or conditions. He will have nothing to do with it. However, He wants to bless each one of us abundantly according to His purposes. The central theme of John chapter fifteen is the need for Christians to consciously abide or remain in Christ. It is out of that vital relationship with Him that we produce good works or fruit in our Christian life.

The message Jesus has for the branches is not just for the spiritually struggling but for those branches who are actively doing many things but they are not the result of the true Vine Himself; they are our best efforts. Separated from the Vine is not just a concern for sinners or the backslider but for those who carry on their Christianity without Christ as the Source of all they produce. There is no such thing as an anemic branch – you either produce fruit as the result of Christ's life or you are actively doing your own thing "for God." God wants fruitfulness by spiritual union, not human achievement.

Those who are joined to Christ in a living way are fruitful. Are we no more than dead wood, or at best just beautiful leaves?

When Death Sets In

I am not sure if we have fully comprehended the meaning of death. It is the lack of Vine life working and flowing within us. When it is not there, rigamortise sets in. It is a common fact that when death begins its course, whether in plants, animals, or humans, a hardening process begins to take place. The problem is not that we are hard or impatient. The problem is we have become unconnected to the Vine. We are not abiding with the result that we begin to wither and harden.

When we begin to wither, we do not have any strength or ability to withstand the process of death that is creeping in. Life goes from us. We tend to fight the process of death rather than move toward plugging back into Life again.

We can spend forever trying to figure out the myriad of ways the enemy has used to get us to cease from abiding or we can go back to abiding. It makes no difference how it is brought about. We need to add the meal instead of fighting the death process (II Kings 4☺).

Unfruitfulness and withering in you as a branch can cause a panic. We begin to see the need for answers. He only becomes valuable as Vine as we recognize our need and Him as provision. Sadly, many have not truly come to these recognitions. So to us, regaining a healthy state of fruitfulness involves personal change, for we have yet to see the tremendous value of the Vine and of His Vine life. We still seem to believe that there is some improvement in us that can be initiated that will make us better. Since this is the case, we usually set about by prayer or works to rectify our situation.

There are three main methods we can choose to remedy our condition. The first is to seek by works to "break through" and improve ourselves. The second is to seek God's help, which may recognize that God is the source but still supposes that we can be "helped." The final method is to look to Jesus, not just as the source but also as the supply. The first two methods will be a consideration as long as we see ourselves as anything other than a branch and as long as we do not see God's method and purpose in filling all things. We have not come to the conclusion that one of the main reasons we were added to the Vine was because everything within ourselves is hopeless and useless.

The answer does not lie within us but in partaking of the root and fatness of the Vine. Our answers lie in the improvement of self but His lay in filling us with His Life. In other words, the process of filling us with Vine life is God's method for the removal of death. In this way, Jesus functions as a "life-giving Spirit" because He is our life (1 Corinthians 15:45; John 14:6). When we relate to Jesus in this way then THIS IS relationship between Vine and branches for we are joined to Him AND His life.

Break In Relations

Once we begin to be separated from our Source, the enemy may get in and violate, contaminate and, through subtlety adversely affect our relationships by ministering negativism whereby we become an accusing and condemning vessel. Many times, when you see a human being that is accusing and condemning, the accuser of the brethren may have a hold on him. He doesn't have the peace of God. He is tormented and miserable. His joy is gone. When we begin to wither, we become a prey to the devil working on our own mind and/or emotions.

So separation from the Vine can eventually lead to separation from others. There can develop a break down in other relations. But what must be recognized is not that there is a problem between people. What the real problem within our relationships is that we are

cut off from the Vine and immediately begin to wither like a branch, which is severed. We lose that tenderness that works in us because of Life.

If you scrape the bark of a branch down underneath it, it will bruise because it is tender; it's got life in it. But cut it off and leave it separated for a few days and it becomes hard. This is a branch trying to function as separated from Vine life.

To not abide in the Vine is to break union and communication with Him. When our communication and life-source is cut off, it begins a death process that will continue right down until it affects our relations with others. The whole process looks something like this: A hardening takes place in us where we are not as tender and sensitive to the Holy Spirit. This lack of contact and sensitivity toward Him causes a hardening within our mind, emotions and soul. This, in turn continues the domino effect as that lack of sensitivity causes a hardening toward other people. Our emotions become dulled and uncaring and our minds become adversely affected. If there is any communication, it is of a negative and not an understanding sort. There is no real communication.

No longer abiding results in many different outward results. Some such results might be lack of joy, unhappiness, and critical viewpoint. The Holy Spirit is very grieved. Failure to abide in the Vine will eventually effect human relationships every time.

Our conclusion is this: We may think that when we are not abiding in the Vine it has no bearing on anybody but ourselves. But whatever spirit is in the driver's seat, or in the ascendancy or predominance in your life, that spirit is ministered to other people. That is why the Bible says to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. To abide in the Vine brings forth the fruit of His nature to others. That is what we minister. But, if we are not abiding, we minister of another spirit and another way which are described as the unfruitful works of darkness. That is what we minister to others.

Men Gather Into The Fire

Ultimately, I believe that everything that is amiss and out of harmony with God is not in union with Him. That does not mean we are not theologically still "in Christ" but we are not walking in the living relationship of it. We are like a branch that is cast forth and has become withered, so men gather them -- I believe that is speaking of what happens to us. We become a prey to the enemy.

Fire is a symbol of judgment, the fiery darts of the wicked, torment, and of misery. Peter refers to fiery trials also. So when you fail to abide in the Vine you will be gathered. You have no strength of your own to overcome a slide into torment and misery. You begin to feel as if you are being thrown into the fire. The more you listen to the wrong source, the worse your condition gets.

Fruit Is The Character Of Christ

First, we learn that abiding in Christ we shall bring forth fruit. We are told that unless we abide in Christ we cannot bring forth. Then we are told that if we abide in Christ, and He in us, we shall bring forth much fruit. From another Scripture we learn that the fruit of the Spirit is, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). What are these lovely qualities but a description of the beautiful character of Christ? So we may surely say that the fruit of which the Lord speaks is the reproduction of His own character in the lives of believers.

The fruit, in this passage, is not souls, service or the exercise of gifts. Gifts are confined to the few: but His nature is open to all. Any setting forth of Christ goes up as fruit to the Father. This, then, is the great object for which we should strive. We can exhibit our character as we try to copy His actions and attitudes yet this is not fruit it is copying. It is not Christ, it is us.

The Fruit Of Joy

From the context of John 15 we find that one of the results of abiding in the Vine is joy. In verse 11, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you." The joy that is His fruit remains. The fact is, you may not be losing your joy at all; you may just be ceasing to abide and these things begin to wither. A branch has no fruit of its own; it bears the fruit of the Vine. A branch has no joy of its own; it only has the joy of the Lord – and that joy imparts strength. You have no strength because you have no joy. A joyful branch enjoys the washing of the Word but one who is not abiding enjoys none of it. The Word is what you live for. It does something for you. It waters you.

If you are no longer abiding in the Vine, praising and worshipping the Lord could become boring to you. Your flesh may not want to do it because your joy is gone and you are in bondage. When our joy is gone, we become impatient. That is a result of not drawing from the TRUE Vine but it's source is self. To move to that place is to move toward darkness. The Bible doesn't call them the unfruitful "fruits" of darkness. It is works. We are no longer channels of His life but have become channel and source. We become a vine unto ourselves and the results of it become "darkness".

To identify a need in ourselves should simply be a red flag to us that we have left off abiding and are now striving. Whatever issues we feel have arisen that have caused us to become impatient are not the true issues. The earth is not the problem but we have left the heavenly Vine and are not abiding as from above. The answer is to turn your eyes from the problems unto Jesus. But do not look to Jesus the Deliverer or Jesus the Problem Fixer. To do that is to only seek answers in the earth, leaving off Jesus AS THE ANSWER. Instead, turn to Jesus, the Vine. He can then flow His patience through you wherein He becomes your source of patience. The same holds true for all other aspects of the self-life. This is no mere teaching or doctrine. This is a very real thing. And if we can understand it, we will be helped much.

The Fruit Of Love

In verse 13 it says: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Notice that this verse is a continuation of the theme here in John 15. Love, laying down our lives and abiding is all uniquely tied together. Love is not some abstract quality, nor is it simply an emotional tenor but is the nature of the Vine. The means by which love gets in us is that God's love is shed abroad in OUR heart. Since God's eternal purpose is to fill all things, this means of branch connected to Vine is the way it is brought about. So it is useless to pray for love when all that is needed is to abide in Him who supplies all things out from Himself. Too many believe their quest lies in the need to become more loving. They come to Jesus to help their condition while they ignore Him as an endless supply. We must embrace this concept as valid even if we don't see how to get there yet.

Abiding in the Vine means to abide in His nature of love that lays down its life for other. This is the greatest act of love. "By this perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16). But when you cease to abide, you get into bondage because you have refused to die to self as source. Self has asserted itself and demanded its right. This causes hardening of the attitudes, which causes you to wither. John 15:13 says: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That's why this is written here. If it isn't related, why is it included in the context of scripture?

Anyone can move their hands and feet and do things but not all can truly love. One is an act, the other is an attitude and way of being. Life quickens and brings forth. The true will of God cannot truly be carried out except by life.

Jesus' Friends

Friendship is a relationship. Jesus here is talking about being His friend. When we won't any longer lay down our lives, we are not relating as His friend. Note now, where it speaks of loving one another, laying down your life for your friend. Verse 14 says, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." And then, "Henceforth I call you not servants."

If they are not friends, you don't tell them all about what you are doing. But to be a friend of Jesus is a desirable position. That is when we learn how to abide in the Lord. That is real fellowship, when we become like Him. Abraham was called the friend of God? God wouldn't do anything until he revealed it to Abraham. He said, "Shall I do this and not reveal it to my servant Abraham?"

Comprehending The Divine Plan

To come to a place of abiding on the part of a branch is to come into communion and understanding of the Husbandman's plan and to flow with it. When you cease to abide or do so sporadically, you probably have not deeply understood what the divine Husbandman's plan concerns. For the strong and independent, the message of the Vine/branch relationship has no merit. But for those who have found that they have failed over and over again and cannot seem to attain, this is a glorious message.

Through the Vine life even a little branch is given hope. The message is not a message of hope found in changing from being fragile and weak branch to a strong one. The message is not strength to self but living by a life not its own. The hope comes, not in the size the veins of the branch are but in what those veins contain – His Life! So it is not a message of prosperity and blessing but one of Life. What is within us as branches is the very life-blood of the Vine Himself. His sweetness fills us.

The branch has no thought of fruit bearing but only of Life within. The goal shifts from fruit bearing to drawing Life from Him who now is the Life of the branch. That life will not fail in us nor fail to bring forth the appointed fruit. When Jesus said, "I am the true Vine" He knows he is the only one who can enter into us and bring forth true fruit. We need to know that also. We cannot take credit for what comes out of us for they come from His root and fatness. He is the One who declares we are joined to Him and we are to believe His dear heart. We are to believe in the strength of the Vine and not our own. Our strength is now out from Him for we are only branches but we are joined. His life overflows out of us in the form of fruit. If we have truly comprehended the eternal plan of God and the meaning of Christ as Vine then we have found our home – We are in Him.

His branches are very precious to Him. He has invested His Son into those branches. Why keep on living by your own life when God has a better way for you? He wants what is best for you and the best there is Christ, so God put Him in you as your source and supply.

You cannot produce fruit for the Vineyard and live by your own life and strength. You cannot produce more fruit unless you maintain a union that is at work in you. Fruitfulness literally is defined as "more of Christ".

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, he takes away . . ." The words "takes away" is better rendered in this context "lifts up." *Airo* is translated "lifted up their voices" (Lk. 17:13; Acts 4:24). "Jesus lifted up His eyes" (Jn. 11:41). The angel "lifted up his hand" (Rev. 10:5). The goal is to "lift them Up: from the earth and get them flowing from the heavenly Vine Life. He takes it out of the dirt on the trellis. He prunes YOUR leaves and growth so Jesus' fruit is more prominent in you. It may seem painful to you to remove all your hard-earned work but to the Father, He is cleansing you. He wants to clean you out so that you will no longer offer up your human efforts as acceptable.

However, in verse six Jesus gave a solemn warning to every branch that fails to abide. "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned." Dead wood is absolutely no value to the Vinedresser. His goal is not to have a great big bonfire but to have fruit. He doesn't want dead wood but living. It is only alive as the Vine flows in it as life. And there is a bonfire going to take place one day. These words should be carefully considered by every branch.

Being dead wood off the vine. We seek to find purpose and direction for dead men. We need life.***