

John 15: The Vine and the Branches

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In John 15 is the last of the seven I AM” statements of the Gospel of John. It is using a very familiar (to the people of Israel) allegory for their relationship with God; the Vine and the Branches. In Isaiah 5:1-7 the prophet wrote a love people to God as the vine dresser. However, when Israel rejected Him, He burned them out. Here is a new vine and branches

In the Vine Language Jesus makes a clear identification of the parts of the allegory. The Vinedresser is The Father. The Vine is Jesus, and by necessary inference the Body of Christ. The Branches are Jesus’ disciples. The Gatherers are Angels (Mat. 13). As an allegory it is not difficult to comprehend. There are several important points made with this illustration.

FIRST: Being Alone Does Not Work. Jesus said “apart from me you can do nothing.” This is a clear straight forward statement about being righteous. Many people think that they are good people. They would say that they live a moral life. But morality alone cannot save. Men can be morally good apart from Christ. Yet apart from Christ they can do nothing. We see this in the man (Acts 11:4) Cornelius.

SECOND: The One True Vine. Jesus and His church are not divisible, as the church is His body. Thus the branch is the one true church. Consider the use of the word “true”. Later Pilate will ask Jesus “what is truth”; this important question is established by Jesus who says that the Word is Truth. There is only one body of Christ (His body – Colossians 1:18, One body – Ephesians 4:4). This passage teaches an exclusive understanding of church.

THIRD: Remaining Connected. Jesus speaks to the need to be abiding (remaining alive) in Christ. Consider this in 1 John 1:5-7. There it is the idea of walking in the light. Consider 2 John 7-9; there the idea of abiding in Christ is abiding in the doctrine of Christ. This is the point of the allegory; we must abide in the doctrine of Christ. Many reject this idea, and instead create a false idea of what Jesus means by doctrine. Yet we are told repeatedly that we obey doctrine, and that the writing of the New Testament is doctrine.

FOURTH: Bearing Fruit on the Vine. Finally, Jesus makes it clear that the branches must bear fruit. Is there a guarantee of Fruit? Colossians 1:9-10 tells us that if we walking in understanding, we will bear fruit. Bearing fruit is a far more natural process than we consider. What Fruit should we expect? The conversation is about spiritual Fruit, found in part in Galatians 5:22-25. To bear fruit we need to remove the weeds, the works of the flesh which hinder fruit (Galatians 5:19-21). How will we know we are successful? “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.” (Matthew 7:16-17)

The importance of the Vine language is clear. We cannot be Godly outside of Jesus Christ. Second, it teaches an exclusivity of relationship. Third, it explains how we remain connected to Him. Finally, it teaches the expectation of bearing fruit.