

**LESSON #24 CHAPTER 15: 1-17*****The Lord and His People***

**Divine Attribute:** Condescendence

**Theological concept:** Abide In Christ

**Geographical location:** Upper Room, Jerusalem

**Chapter Structure**

15: 1-11 Vine and Branches - We Must Abide in Christ

15: 12-17 Friends of Jesus - We Must Love One another

**Spiritual Principles:**

P1 To abide in Christ is to love God with all our heart and give Him our full obedience

P2 Spiritual pruning is necessary for the church and individual to grow and to experience joy

P3 The sacrifices we made for our brothers are also for the Lord

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**Today's lesson...**

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In the last lesson, we heard Jesus speaking about the first two promises of the Holy Spirit: Our indwelling Helper and timely Interpreter. He will interpret God's will for us and will help us live in obedience to God. Before He moved on to give the third promise of the Holy Spirit as our witness (15:26), he made the last "I am" declaration to bring out the wonderful spiritual fact of their union with Christ, as well as this mutual indwelling, like all relationships, brings about privileges for them to enjoy as well as responsibilities for them to fulfil.

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**A.15: 1-11 Vine and Branches - We Must Abide in Christ**

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*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

*3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you."* (vv.1-3)

This is the 7th "I am" declaration. Jesus used the allegory of a vine and its branches to depict the mutual indwelling with his people. The cultivation of vineyards is vital to the life and economy of Israel and is very familiar to every Jew. (Herod's temple was adorned with a golden vine). We need to understand the four elements in this allegory in order to grasp what Jesus is teaching here: The vine, the branches, the gardener and the fruit.

**The vine**

The vine is one of the OT figures used to illustrate the people of Israel. In Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5:1-7 (Jer 2:21, Ezek 19:10-14, Hos 10:1), Israel is the vine which God brought out of Egypt and planted in the land of Canaan. *"What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?"* (Isa 5: 4 NIV) If ever a nation had everything it needed to succeed, it was Israel. But the choice wine produced wild grapes!

Instead of producing righteousness, it produced unrighteousness and cries of distress from the victims. Instead of serving Yahweh their God, they made for themselves all kinds of idols.

“Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones.” (Hos 10:1 NIV)

“I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?” (Jer 2: 21 NIV)

But as Israel turned away to idolatry, God’s wrath and judgment fell on them. But even the chastise of God did not produce lasting results. When God’s own Son came to the vineyard, they cast Him out and killed Him! (Mat 21:33-46)

In Rev 14:14-20 we see the “vine of the earth” was cut down and destroyed in the winepress of God’s wrath when Jesus Christ returns. It is the time when believers are ripe for the new heaven and new earth, and unbelievers are ripe for ruin.

When Jesus said “I am the true vine”, he is saying that the church, who is in union with him and thus draws life from him, is the true Israel. “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom 9: 6)

### **The branches**

“4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Every Jew knows that the wood of a dead vine branch cannot be used to make a piece of furniture or a utensil of any kind, not even to serve as a peg; it is only good for fuel (v. 6). Thus, a branch is lifeless and useless unless it remains attached to the vine. The living sap from the stock flowing into it enables it to grow and produce grapes. This symbolises that our communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit makes the bearing of fruit possible.

We are but branches. The sooner we believers discover this the better we will relate to the Lord, for we will confess our own weakness and cling on to Christ for his strength. We are nobody until we are in Christ and we become somebody.

The key concept here is to **abide in Christ**, which was brought up in chapter 14. It is used 11 times in this passage. To abide means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to produce fruit. Paul meant the same thing when he says in Galatians 2;20 “It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me” and in Philippians “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (4:13)

“9...Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.”

Christ’s calls for us to “abide in me” in verse 4 and “abide in my love” in verse 9 indicate that there is a responsibility in this privilege. Not all branches on a vine produce fruit. Fruit-bearing is not automatic for a branch. Even though our abiding relationship with Chris is natural through regeneration, it must be cultivated in the Christian life in order to produce fruit. This is the process of sanctification that requires a joint effort from the saint and the Indwelling Holy Spirit.

What does “abide in Christ” mean? Verse 9 and 10 tells us that it is to simply **love God and give Him our full obedience**. It is not a special spiritual feeling but down-to-earth daily practices: worship, meditation on God’s word, prayer, service and sacrifice, do it all according to God’s will.

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**P1 to abide in Christ is to love God with all our heart and give Him our full obedience**

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### The Fruit

“<sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

There are two main kinds of spiritual fruit in the New Testament. In Galatians 5:22,23 is the fruit of the Spirit that glorifies God and produces good work for others; this is the **fruit of sanctification of Christlikeness**. In Roman 1:13 is the **fruit of evangelism**: we bear fruit when a person believes and enters the Kingdom of God through our witness and our sharing of the gospel. Both the fruit of sanctification and evangelism are the fruit of the Gospel, which is what Jesus is referring here.

### The Vinedresser (Gardener in NIV)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

The vinedresser is in charge of caring for the vines, and Jesus said this is the work of His Father. A good vinedresser prunes well, and a well-pruned vine will produce more fruit. We like to be fruitful, but many of us do not enjoy the necessary pruning process.

There are two types of branches on a vine: fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing. Jesus said that both types of branches need to undergo pruning. He used two different words for the unfruitful and fruitful branches. For the unfruitful branches, the vinedresser will **cut** them **off** the vine and throw them into the fire as fuel; this represents the scene of ultimate judgment on the last day.

For those that do bear fruit, if left to themselves, the branches might produce many clusters, but those will be inferior in quality. Therefore, the vinedresser **prunes** them, which means **clean**, by removing some living parts so that the vine's vitality is not dissipated and thus improves the quality of the crop. A harvest of good quality fruit glorifies God even more!

One thing we ought to be clear: when the Lord said the Father cut off unfruitful branches, he was not saying that we may lose our salvation. In the previous lessons, the Lord assured us that it would not happen. “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” And “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” (6:37, 10:28) Good work is the evidence of living faith (Jas 2:26 faith without deeds is dead.). God, the vinedresser, knows who is His and who is not. For example, Judah Iscariot was one of those who were cut off from the vine.

The pruning process is the most important part of the whole enterprise, and the people who do it must be carefully trained on where to cut, when to cut, how to cut, and how much to cut. Otherwise, they can destroy an entire crop. We can apply the pruning to individual Christians as well as the local churches.

Sometimes, God cuts away dead wood that might cause trouble, such as a friendship that gives us bad influence. But pruning does not always mean spiritual surgery that removes what is bad. Often, God

removes parts of the good branches that are robbing us of spiritual vigour, such as a meaningful but demanding job that takes up all our time. Sometimes, He removes the good and the better so that the best may come out of us. It is the same for the church.

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Yes, pruning hurts, but it also helps and is necessary. We may not enjoy it, but we need it. Jesus assures us that abiding in Christ means to abide in His love and His joy! This is what Paul meant when he says, "rejoice in the Lord!" (Php 3:1) It is indeed a joyful experience for a true Christian to obey the Lord and to see that we be able to produce much more and better fruit! Indeed, once you have cultivated this deeper communion with Christ, you have no desire to return to the shallow life of a careless Christian.

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**P2 Spiritual pruning is necessary for the church and individual to grow and to experience joy**

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The 'words' in verse 7 are the individual utterances that make up the 'word' (singular), *logos* in Greek, in verse 3. *Logos* is Jesus' teaching in its entirety. Jesus himself is the embodiment of all his teachings.

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**B. 15: 12-17 Friends of Jesus - We Must Love One Another**

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<sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> **You are my friends if you do what I command.** <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

The love for Christ and for one another is the key to keeping the church together, especially in times of trial and persecution. The Lord also knows that, because of our fallen nature, the disciples would have difficulty living out the new commandment he gave them in 13:34 (**Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another**). So he reiterated it to them with a new privilege—his friend.

You call someone a friend when you can trust them and when they share your concerns. Thus, a servant can be a friend when two conditions are met: first, when the master shares his business with them, and second, they reciprocate the master's trust by sharing his concerns.

Jesus said that he would see us as his friend when we understood his business on earth - the salvation work of God- and when we shared his concerns.

Jesus has already revealed to us who he is and what his mission on Earth is. We can understand it when we study the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our commitment to his mission is demonstrated by fulfilling his commands (v.14).

<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup>This is my command: Love each other.

Being Jesus' friend is a privilege. First is that we are chosen. Second is that we can be fruitful by calling out to the Father. With this privilege comes the responsibility of being God's friend: **obey him in loving one another**<sup>(v.14)</sup>. The highest extent of Christ's love is that he sacrificed his life for us. In other words, if we are Christ's friend, we are to love the unloving and unlovable brother and be prepared to make great sacrifices for your brother to the point of death. Nonetheless, because we do it out of obedience to Christ, the sacrifices we made for our brother are also for our Lord!

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### **P3 The sacrifices we made for our brothers are also for the Lord**

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So, let us not ask: is this brother worthy of my sacrifice? The question to ask is: Am I worthy of Christ's sacrifice? When every believer in church - all branches on the vine - is willing to follow Christ's example in loving one another, then the church will be like a city on the hill or a shining star in the universe testifying Jesus is the Son of God!

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#### **Life application**

Do you find it hard to like someone in church? Well, Jesus said go love him and be prepared to make sacrifices for him, even to lay down your life for him. If you are willing to do it for Christ, then do it for your brother.

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#### **Closing**

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Many people come to church expecting to be loved, cared for and served. Are you one of them? This chapter reminds us that as we abide in Christ, we have privileges as well as responsibilities. These privileges and responsibilities are part of being a member of the church. Let us learn to love our brothers and sisters in Truth Baptist Church, and be willing to make sacrifices for every one of them.