

# VINE

For our communion services we pause from our 'regular' series of Bible studies and present a devotion on a name or title of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There are more than seven hundred such names or titles. To narrow it down we have arbitrarily used the English alphabet. We take each letter of our alphabet and find a name or title of our Lord.

Our letter this month, the letter 'V', and we find one of the most endearing names of the Lord in John 15:1,

**John 15:1** "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

As chapter fourteen ended, Jesus said, **Arise, let us go from here.** He and the eleven remaining disciples began their walk to the Garden of Gethsemane. They may have passed by the Temple, which had grapevines carved into its doors. Or they may have passed by vineyards.

There are seven **I AM** statements of Jesus:

1. **I AM the bread of life** (John 6:35 & 48).
2. **I AM the light of the world** (John 8:12 & 9:5).
3. **I AM the door** (John 10:7).
4. **I AM the good shepherd** (John 10:11-14).
5. **I AM the resurrection and the life** (John 11:14).
6. **I AM the way, the truth, and the life** (John 14:6).
7. **I AM the true vine** (John 15:1 & 5).

**I AM** is *egōeimi*, words that actually are not very significant in themselves. The word *eimi* is simply the verb *to be* and is merely the usual word of existence. To Greeks in Jesus' day, and to our ears today, Jesus was just saying, "I exist."

Ah, but that's not what the Jews heard! They instantly noted Jesus' reference to Exodus 3:14, when Moses asked God His name and God answered: **I AM THAT I AM**, which declares God "to be" self-existent, without beginning, without end. This is also expressed in the term *Yahweh*, "I Am the One Who Is," the most significant name

for God in the OT. So when Jesus said, “I have always been,” the Jews were enraged beyond reason or control. Similar statements on other occasions enraged the Jews because they understood that Jesus was claiming equality with God.

Jesus, in the seventh and last of His great **I AM** statements, says that He is the **true vine**, and that God is the **vinedresser**. The **vine** is a reference to what you and I would call the trunk. The job of the vinedresser is to tend the branches that abide in the trunk so that they produce fruit. In verse five you learn that **you** are those branches!

Jesus describes the work of the vinedresser with the branches – the work of the Father in your life – beginning in verse two.

**John 15:2** Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

What does Jesus mean when He says a branch that bears no fruit will be **taken away**? It sounds very serious – *and it is!*

We have a decision to make that will affect our understanding of Jesus’ words. The decision we have to make is this: Is Jesus speaking only about believers in these verses, or is He speaking about both believers and unbelievers?

Before we answer that, let’s read verse six – because our answer will affect our understanding of that verse as well:

**John 15:6** If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

If Jesus is speaking about *both* believers and unbelievers, then those who bear no fruit and are taken away are unbelievers. Outwardly they seem like branches; but they have no life in them, so they do not truly abide in the vine. When you follow this through, verse six is understood to be describing the final, eternal judgment of unbelievers. Judas might provide an example of what Jesus is talking about. He had, in chapter thirteen, been dismissed, “taken away.” Outwardly he seemed like a branch, but he never was abiding

in the vine. Now he was headed for the eternal fires of Hell, described in verse six.

Other Bible scholars say that Jesus is *only* talking to and about believers in these verses. If that is the case, verse six can be applied to the believer's loss of reward at the Judgement Seat of Jesus Christ. The **fire** and the **burning** are what is described in First Corinthians 3:11-15,

**1 Corinthians 3:11** For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

**1 Corinthians 3:12** Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

**1 Corinthians 3:13** each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

**1 Corinthians 3:14** If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.

**1 Corinthians 3:15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

(I should mention that other Bible scholars point out that **take away** might also refer to a believer's premature death. There are instances in the New Testament of unfruitful believers dying prematurely as God disciplines them).

I don't have the definite answer, so I'd like to suggest a different approach. Jesus is speaking to **anyone** who is not bearing fruit in his or her life. If there is no fruit in your life, you may be an unbeliever. Regardless your outward attachment to the church or to Christians, you may never have been saved. If so, you will be taken away, cast out, thrown into the eternal fires of Hell and burned – unless you repent and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior!

It's also only too possible that you *are* a Christian, but are unfruitful. The passage we read in First Corinthians indicates it is possible to be an unfruitful Christian. You need to begin to bear fruit so as not to suffer the loss of reward when the fire reveals it at the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ. And you certainly don't want the Lord to discipline you with a premature death!

Let's say you are a believer. How do you bear fruit? *I'm glad you asked!* According to Jesus, you can bear **fruit**, **more fruit**, and **much fruit**. Look at verse two again:

**John 15:2** Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

If you are **in** Jesus, a believer but not bearing fruit, the Father will first **take** you **away**. The Greek word for take away can mean *lift up* or *raise up*. It's not necessarily a picture of useless branches being removed; it's more a picture of them being refreshed. The vinedresser lifts them up to get more of the sun's light; he puts them in a position to encourage **fruit**. **The Father will somehow lift you more into the light of His Son, Jesus!**

If you are bearing fruit, the Father will **prune** you so that you bear even **more fruit**. This word **prune** can mean *to cut*, but it can also mean *to cleanse*. It's not the application of pruning shears, but rather the cleaning off of the branch with pure water. Vinedressers still use this technique as a gentle way to encourage fruit on the branches.

I know this is the meaning here because of what Jesus says next, in verse three:

**John 15:3** You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. - being changed to bring change -

The Father isn't lopping you off; He's lifting you up! He isn't cutting you; He's cleansing you! He exposes you to the Son of God through the Word of God to produce **fruit** and **more fruit** in your life.

With this as background, Jesus introduces the concept of **abiding**:

**John 15:4** Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

**John 15:5** "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

The illustration is simple: The branch is totally dependent upon the vine to live and to produce fruit. Abide in Jesus and you will produce fruit, more fruit, and much fruit.

John 15:6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

As I said, this certainly can apply to unbelievers. The word **cast out** is used elsewhere by Jesus to describe the casting out to Hell of unbelievers at the end of the age. And it can certainly refer to a believer's loss of reward or premature death. Let this verse speak to you who are unfruitful – *unbeliever* and *believer*.

What this *does not* and *cannot* mean is that a believer can lose his or her salvation. We resolved that issue back in chapter ten when Jesus as the Good Shepherd promised His sheep that they can **never** perish.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Wow! I can ask “what[ever] [I] desire, and it shall be done for [me].” But verse eight tells me what I must desire: *To glorify the Father!* I suggest that what you **ask** for is **fruit**, **more fruit**, and **much fruit** to be produced in your life. This is what the vinedresser – God the Father – will do for you when you ask.

The secret, the key, is **abiding**. Look at a branch on the vine. What is it doing? Is it working hard, struggling, stressing to produce fruit? No – it is simply in constant contact with the vine, being lifted up and cleansed by the vinedresser. **Fruit**, **more fruit**, and **much fruit** are byproducts of the branch depending totally on the vine.

Your part in all this seems to be to *pray* and *read the Word*. Jesus specifically tells you to **ask** – to pray; and He speaks of your being cleansed by the water of the Word.

Pray and read God's Word to remain dependent and you will be abiding in Jesus. Read to discover what fruit God wants to produce in you, then pray asking Him to do it. Chuck Smith puts this into perspective, saying,

One of our biggest problems is that we tend to be more interested in what we do than in what we are, while God is more interested in what we are than in what we do. He looks for fruit; we try to produce works.

What fruit does God want to produce in you? **Love**, according to Jesus. Not the feeling of love, or love as an emotion; it is love as an action. Read Galatians five. The fruit of His Spirit is love, described as joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control. Do these things characterize your life?

Ask for them and the Father delights to produce them.

