

- ***READ John 15:1-8*** As Jesus is right on the cusp of being arrested, tortured, and murdered at the hands of godless men, we find our Lord not seeking encouragement but giving encouragement. You would think that the one who was about to suffer so greatly would be eating up any sort of well wishes, encouragement, or love, but instead we find Him giving what we would most likely be searching for. Surely the words of **Philippians 2:3,4** come to our mind when we see Jesus doing what He is doing in **John 13-17**. Seeing what we see in these chapters in John's Gospel, I believe we can more clearly understand what Paul is saying when he writes, *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others."*
- Our Lord knew the difficulties that were about to face His Apostles, and He wanted to do everything He could to make sure they were ready to face what was to come. Yet, in the middle of a discussion where much encouragement is offered, we also see Jesus handing down some important admonitions that the Apostles would do well to remember as they went forward in their work in the Gospel. Here in **John 15:1-9**, we find Jesus instructing His closest followers to remember that He is the true vine. Twice in these verses, we see Jesus referring to Himself as the vine, but why does He refer to Himself as such?
- This "I Am" statement of Jesus is the last such statement in God's Gospel account, and it serves as both an admonition and a warning for these men to remember going forward. This warning and these principles were to aid them in their lives as disciples, and they continue to aid us in much the same way. Let's take a few moments to conclude our studies of Jesus's "I Am" statements by looking at what we can learn about this world, Jesus, and ourselves from Jesus stating, *"I am the true vine."*

I. There are false vines in the world. (John 15:1)

A. Many have elevated other individuals or ideas to a place of preeminence and authority.

1. The fact that Jesus has to state *"I am the true vine"* tells me that there will be those who try to prop themselves up as a vine deserving of preeminence and authority. Throughout the world we see different individuals or ideas having been lifted up to a place of great importance. They have been lifted up to a position where others feel they are worthy of the devotion and honor that we would reserve only for Jesus.
2. Many different religions have their own god-type figure or savior that has been elevated to a higher status than just the regular person. Muhammed is known as God's most holy prophet within Islam, and he is seen as being the greatest of prophets who is due more respect than just an ordinary man. Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, is seen as an individual of extreme enlightenment who was able to transcend the struggles of this world. He is seen as the ultimate example of who people ought to want to be like.
3. There are examples of this same type of thing found under the Christianity umbrella. Think of the position in which the pope holds within the Catholic church. He is known as the physical head of the whole church on earth, and is referred to by many as "holy Father." I don't believe it a stretch to say that he has taken up a place where many would call him a vine since he has taken up a position of such authority and preeminence. Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints, is seen as God's special prophet and he is revered as if he was a perfect man who truly knew the mind of God.
4. Even within our own lives we might elevate certain individuals to a place of prominence where we are willing to listen and follow them no matter what they say. Or it could be that we elevate different ideas to the same sort of status. What is traditional is what we will do and follow. Whatever is done in the name of unity or love will be what we seek to do. Whether it be a person, idea, or concept, we must be aware that they can be elevated to a place of authority and reverence that ought to only be occupied by Jesus the true vine.

B. Jesus stands alone as the one who deserves the preeminence.

1. But why is it that Jesus is the one deserving of such a place of prominence in our minds? One reason is because God has elevated Him to such a place because of His perfect example of love in giving Himself to come to earth to die for the sins of mankind. **(Philippians 2:5-11)** It is at His name that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Him as Lord.
2. Furthermore, Paul writes to the Colossians that Jesus is worthy of the preeminence because He is God and has done incredible things for us. **(Colossians 1:15-20)** He is the physical manifestation of deity. He had a hand in creating all things. He holds all things together. He is the head of the body, the church. He was raised from the dead to show God's power in and through Him, and in Him the fullness of deity dwells. Because of these things, Paul states that he is deserving of having first place in everything. That includes being the true vine through whom all true spiritual life comes. There are many other individuals and ideas that have tried to take the place with or beside Jesus, but no one and nothing can claim to be what Jesus is.

II. Jesus, the true vine, expects for His branches to bear much fruit. (John 15:2-5)

A. The presence of Jesus within our lives will be evident.

1. This type of influence from Jesus onto others can be seen in **Acts 4:1-13** when Peter and John were standing before the Sanhedrin being questioned as to how this lame man was now up about and walking. Peter stood boldly before his captors and declared that everything they had seen had been done *"by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead."* These words of Peter were a slap in the face to those surrounding him because it was at their hands that Jesus had been killed. It took some real guts for Peter and John to say what they said, yet it was by these words and their demeanor that the people, *"were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."*
2. This same kind of thing can happen to us if we are willing to allow Christ and His Spirit to influence us to the fullest extent. When we allow for Jesus to be our source of spiritual strength, our main focus, and our main purpose we will be changed. We will be made to be different. Instead of living a life where we only live for self and perform the works of the flesh that are seen in **Galatians 5:19-21**, we will begin to produce the fruit of the Spirit. **(Galatians 5:22-25)** If these things are present in our lives then it will only be a result of a life that has been filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."* If we truly are branches of King Jesus then we will look and behave as He would. We will think like Him, and people will recognize us as if we have been with Him, as well.

B. If we don't bear fruit, then we will be cut off away from Jesus the vine.

1. However, what happens if we are not bearing fruit for Jesus? What happens if we are not living a life that shows us as being led by the Spirit? Jesus makes it very clear when He says that those branches that do not produce fruit will be cut off. **(John 15:2)**
2. The expectation of Jesus is that His branches will be busy bearing fruit that honors Him, but if we are not doing that then He says we will be taken away and cut off. If we are not bearing fruit as we should then we need to figure out what the problem is...Is there a lack of dedication on our part to Jesus? Are we not fully invested in our faiths? Maybe we don't truly appreciate what has been done for us, so we don't give a full effort to live for Him as His kingdom as we should. Maybe we are not bearing fruit because we are not truly abiding in Him as He says we must. Eight times in these nine verses we see Jesus speaking to the need for us to abide in Him and what happens if we fail to do so.

III. The ability to bear much fruit depends on our willingness to abide in Him. (John 15:4-9)

A. To abide in Jesus, we must fully submit to His authority.

1. As the true vine, we are fully dependent upon Jesus as our source of nutrients and life. If a branch is removed from the vine, it will quickly die because it has no source from which to gain life and nutrients. A dying or dead branch cannot bear fruit. Therefore, if Jesus expects for us to bear fruit then we must be able to stay attached to Him as the vine. This seems simple enough, but we must recognize that staying attached to Jesus as the vine depends on our willingness to abide in Him. This means that we must submit to Him in all things.
2. Remember, eight times in **John 15:1-9**, we find Jesus speaking of the need to abide in Him. To abide in Jesus, we must come to Him on His terms, not our own. We must recognize that He was speaking the truth when He said He was the way, the truth, and the life. (**John 14:6**) He was able to speak such things truthfully because He is the one to whom all power and authority has been granted. Jesus said in **Matthew 28:18**, *"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."* How is such a thing possible? It was made possible because God exalted Him to such a position. *"For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name."* (**Philippians 2:9**) We see this picture painted for us in **Acts 2:33-36**. Peter declares that Jesus, the man they had crucified, was now seated at the right hand of God. He was seated in a place of authority, and they need to respect Him as such. He was and is both Lord and Christ. He is Lord...the one possessing authority. He is the Christ...the one who offers salvation.
3. Again, this all sounds simple at face value. Of course we want to abide in Jesus and gain the benefit of being a branch on His vine. Yet, here's the thing...People want to abide in Jesus and gain Him as their Savior, but they are not willing to submit to Him as Lord. They love the salvation, but they don't love the idea of having to submit. They love Jesus the Savior, but they don't love Jesus the Lord. Unfortunately for them, Jesus is both.

B. Our unwillingness to submit to Him will only lead to our being cut off.

1. This type of mentality will only lead to us being thrown away from Jesus, and it gives way to denominational thinking. (**John 15:6**) The Father will not allow for a branch to dictate what the vine will do. As branches, we are only able to do as the vine desires and allows. How can it be said that God is glorified if the branches are going off doing their own thing and not submitting to the authority of His Son?
2. This is the crux of the issue when some want to use these verses as justification for denominationalism. They would claim that Jesus is the vine as He truly is, but that we are all just different branches of Him. Of course, this sounds nice! It's nice to think that all the different denominations (who buy the way believe, teach, and practice not just different, but often contradictory messages) are just different branches on the same vine. It's nice to think that we can all be so different and produce completely different fruit for Jesus, but this is all very illogical! How can two completely different branches, teaching completely different doctrines, and practicing their faiths in contradictory ways belong to the same vine? It just can't happen. Besides all of that...Jesus is speaking here of individuals and not separate types of churches. Jesus never had the division of today as a part of His plan for His church.
3. Instead of being divided, we must all willfully submit to Jesus Lordship and authority. Otherwise, we will be cut off from Jesus and thrown into fire to be burned up. Our love for Jesus must be to the degree that we will fully submit to His authority in all things. The love of God was seen in give His Son on our behalf. Jesus's love was seen in giving Himself for us. Our love must be seen in fully giving ourselves to Him in all things. (**John 15:9**)

Yes, Jesus wants at this moment to encourage His Apostles for the difficulties ahead, but He also seeks to remind them that their success moving forward would greatly depend on their willingness to abide in Him as the true vine and to be His branches bearing godly fruit. While these instructions were firstly given to these handpicked disciples, they continue to ring true for us in our lives. May we always respect Jesus as the true vine. May we submit to His authority so that we might always be successful in bearing fruit to His glory.

PRAYER *Our loving Father in heaven...we approach You and give thanks for Your willingness to allow each of us to be branches of Your Son the true vine. We are so thankful that He strengthens us to bear fruit to His glory. May You help each of us to be strong branches who are constantly bearing much fruit. May we do so through always abiding in Your Son and submitting ourselves to His will. Help us to love ourselves less and to love You and Your Son more. Strengthen us as we go throughout this week to bear much fruit, and may our godly lives lead others to You. Thank You for all of Your blessings, especially the blood of Your Son that cleanses us of our sins. It is in Him, the true vine we pray...amen.*