

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Jesus gives us some incredible imagery from agriculture, a very familiar theme in the first century culture that connects to our relationship with God and His relationship with us. Herein is the theme: *what it takes to be in Christ and thrive for God's glory and our betterment.* This is about our responsibilities, uniqueness, gifting, and purpose all flowing from His love to us. Jesus is saying, *I am the vine, the main and only channel of life and substance, and God is the cultivator; He is the one in charge. He is the one who will judge, and cut off those who do not produce fruit, those who refuse His love and do nothing but evil. He will also prune to get our attention so we may improve and be enabled to succeed; He will, if necessary, cut us off when we refuse His grace—but then it will be too late.* He expects us to bear fruit and will do what is best for us to be cultivated in Him and for Him to better produce His love and goodness for the furtherance of His kingdom. It is good that He prunes, for we need His cultivation and nourishment; without Him, we can do nothing—we can't know Him, we can't live in Him, and we can't work in and for Him without His life giving sustenance. So, we must receive and remain in Him, growing and thriving in Him for all the goodness and nourishment to happen and to flow in and out of us. The true disciple can see his/her role as a child deeply loved, being cared for so growth and faithfulness will result in others coming to Him. If not, we will rot away; refusing His sustenance and life will only dry us up, burning us away. God wants us to thrive in Him, not be weeds or thorns that will only hurt ourselves and others. Thus, He will do all He can to enable us to thrive and give Him Glory. In Him, this can be so; our only enemy is us, embracing the weeds and pestilence rather than Christ the Vine.

Contexts and Background

This passage continues during the Last Supper at Jesus' great "Farewell Discourse" where He gives His most passionate and important instructions about love and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the only way to God, salvation, and life. This image uses a lot of wordplay with horticultural terms to show our God who comes to us, who brings heaven to us, allows us to live in and for Him, and who will grow and cultivate the best in us for His glory and our betterment. This is beyond deep fellowship. It is not just life; it is life itself—abundant and triumphant. We can not only communicate and experience God; we commune and dwell in Him both now and throughout eternity to come. When we are in Him, we glorify God and build a better life, furthering His impacting kingdom.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *True / real.* This means the "final" right one, the place to be. Whereas Israel was the precursor, a shadow to Christ called the garden; the fulfillment is Christ. Our life in Christ is a living relationship, where we are called to not only live and thrive, but be productive and useful, and all because we are in communion with Him.
- *Vine.* Referring to a grapevine, a metaphor for God's living, salvation-giving sustenance to us His people. This is an "I am" saying of Jesus—a description of His name "to be" and character, meaning Jesus is our prime source of life and nourishment. In the Old Testament, Israel is called God's vineyard and His vine, while God is the vine-grower. This was a symbol of Israel's power and her purpose to produce fruit and glory to God, and His law and love to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 3:14; Psalm 40:1-2; 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-7; 53:6; Jer. 2:21; 6:9; Ezek. 15; 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Hos. 10:1; 14:8; John 4:24; 6:35; 8:58; Rom. 3:23; 10:9).
- *Gardener / Vine-grower / Vinedresser / Husbandman.* Meaning one who works the soil. A name for God as the One who wants fruit, so He nourishes, cultivates, protects, and grows His children and then prunes for a greater harvest and life.
- *Cuts off / lifts up.* A metaphor to God's righteous judgment and inspection. As we rework a plant so it can be healthier and more productive, God does so with us. God has the right to work and nurture us and to judge like the judge at the county fair looking for the prized fruits and vegetables. This is so He can do what He must do to get rid of the frauds and to teach, inspire, mold, motivate, coach, discipline,

and encourage His children to have a godly life that is productive and useful (Matt. 3:8; 7:16-20; Gal 5:22-23; Eph. 2:10; 5:9; Phil 1:11).

- *Branch.* Meaning our relationship in Christ, our being united in Christ, part of His plan and His appendage as He provides the indispensable sap of substance for life and salvation and faithfulness. A branch is a part of the vine with the sole purpose to produce its fruit. If it can't do that because of infection or rot or bad care, it must be fertilized and developed to coax it to thrive and produce. If nothing ever comes from it and it is dead, it never was His Vine stem (like Judas) (Eph. 1:22-23).
- *Bears no fruit.* We cannot be fruitful apart from Jesus. The sap of God's nourishment has never flowed in the face of one's own erected barriers (Matt. 3:8; 7:16-20; 13:18-23; 24:12; Luke 6:43-45; John 8:31-32; Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11; Heb. 3:14-19; 6:4-8; 10:27-31).
- *Bear fruit.* Referring to a growing faith that is fed and focused on our response to Christ that motivates the Fruit of the Spirit and moral and virtuous thinking and action because of God's love to us and our gratitude and love back to Him. This is God's love and work in us that flows in through His Holy Spirit and out of us to others around us—all because we have a personal relationship with Christ. We have God's living presence in us, living in us (Matt. 6:10; Rom. 5:1-5; 12:1-21; 1 Cor. 12:1-14:40; Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 4:1-6:20; 2 Peter 1:3-9).
- *Prunes / purgeth.* Means to cleanse and to fix and remove what is not good, which is by God's loving, necessary intervention. This is good; all fruit bearing trees must be cultivated to work well, and what is dead cut off or they will be overcome by insects and disease. Even when all is well, they will not produce as much as they could have unless there is pruning, fertilizing, and care. God will remove any hindrance that stagnates our spiritual growth. This can also be a warning about judgment if one does nothing, and is also an image of care. Just like a good parent warning their child, disciplining him/her so he/she can know better, and cultivating better maturity, we have to be pruned so we can grow better. The question is *why would we fear this and not want it* (Isa. 5:1; Heb. 12:3-11)?
- *Fruitful.* This is a call to be obedient, to multiply the seed given to us. We are to make disciples of His Word. We are to point to Christ, never to ourselves! We need disciples of Christ, not of people like ourselves! This is a standard call of God to do something productive and effectual with our life and faith. To have a great gift like salvation, and do nothing with it is a great insult to the gift giver, God, and a proof of ingratitude and nonuse, which would prove that one is either not saved or highly disobedient and foolish (Isa. 27:6; Hos. 14:4-8).
- *Clean.* God wants sincere devotion—in contrast to the betrayal of Judas. The context is Jesus washing His Disciples' feet (John 13:10).
- *Word.* God's Word, the Bible, and the work of the Holy Spirit; using the Bible's precepts as the template for our nourishment and pruning. It shows us the Gardener and His fertilizer and the sin that needs to be cut off.
- *Remain / abide / dwell in me.* This is stated eleven times in this passage, forty times in this Gospel. It means to preserve and commune with, as in our continual relationship in and with Christ (more in next study).
- *Remain in you.* A branch not attached to the vine is lifeless and useless.
- *Apart from me.* If a Christian says he/she knows Christ but there is no evidence (perhaps even the opposite like stated in Galatians 5 and the sets of rotten fruit as opposed to the Fruit of the Spirit), then it is possible that the person was never saved, had no connection to the Vine, and is therefore destined for hell. This is also a warning to get busy with one's faith!
- *Thrown away.* Referring to those who never accepted Christ as well as those who did but are apostate and thus have lost their rewards and/or opportunities. This does not mean one can lose his/her salvation here, but if one is in Christ and is continually disobedient, he/she will be punished severely and God has the right to do so. God is set to punish those who refuse Him and those who are

apostate, who say they know Him but do nothing with their faith or act contrary to God's precepts (Matt. 3:12; 25:41-46; John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 10:28-29; 15:22-24; Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 3:15; Gal. 5; Jude 7; Rev. 20:14:)

- *Withers*. Meaning dead and worthless and of no use without God's life-giving sap—like a dead vine that can't be used for building anything (remember Jesus was a carpenter), and does not even make good firewood. A slap to the one who thinks they can do life and ministry without Christ or seeks to go at it by one's pride and will rather than the focus of Christ as Lord.
- *Fire and burned*. Meaning to be judged: inspection for Christians and judgment for those who never accepted Christ (John 6:39; 10:27-28).
- *Ask whatever you wish*. Referring on the character of being loyal so to identity with His purpose, plan, and call. The call here is to expand one's faith and thinking so Christ is all and working in and through us. In Jewish teachings, God provided a call to His pious people and provided for all who served Him because of the intimate relationship they and we have. But, this is always in context to God's will and providence and never an excuse for us to abuse nor some kind of magic formula for success (Luke 11:1-13; John 15:16; 1 John 5:14; 14:1-14).
- *Father's glory*. The Son glorifies the Father and shows us that our purpose in life and ministry is to glorify Christ. We are to not only know Christ or to not only make Him known; it is bigger and more active than that; we are to further His Kingdom and bring Him glory. This is not about results; it is about our communing trust in Him that motivates our obedience and our ability and willingness to please God (John 13:31-32).
- *Showing yourselves*. The prime evidence is loving obedience. How do we live? How are we with people? Do we point to Christ in our ministry or do we succumb to our pride and seek only to serve ourselves? Are we bitter or better, angry or faithful, jealous or kind? The reality of our union in Christ will display our true nature and display our Lord. This is not about salvation; one who is not saved was never a part of the Vine.
- *Disciples*. Authentic salvation is verified by obedience and fruit bearing, the mark of a disciple in this passage. Without trust and obedience, we prove ourselves unworthy to be His and we prove ourselves not to be a Christian. Grace is free for us, beyond the concept of cost for God, and is evidenced by our response (Matt. 7:20; Luke 6:43-45; Heb. 6:9).
- *I am in my Father, and you are in me*. The mutual and reciprocal indwelling of the Triune God who gives and who deserves and expects to receive love. Jesus is the One who reveals the Father. He relates that faith in Him, in Jesus, is equal to faith in God, thus we will be upheld and be successful (2 Chron. 20:20; John 10:38; 11:25-26; 14:10)

Devotional Thoughts and Applications

What does it take to be a faithful and fruitful Christian, to be attached to Christ as His love and work flows in and through us? If we claim to know Christ as Lord and hang in His Church, we must yearn to imitate Him and follow His precepts, especially when we lead others! This happens when we show the faith to permanently leave our sinful lives, and with overwhelming gratitude, follow Jesus. We must first follow before we can lead. We are never to be unfaithful, prideful, manipulative, or abusive to the people God gives us to care for, for such an act is wicked and we will be held to a strict accounting (Jer. 23:1-2; 31:34; Ezek. 34:11-31; Mic. 5:4; 6:8; Hos. 6:6; John 15 and 16; 17:21-23).

Faithfulness comes when we are in a state of right being; this can only come about from a right, growing relationship with God, which, in turn, only comes by accepting what Christ has done for us and applying it to our lives by faith. This helps us create an atmosphere of happiness, contentment, cooperation, and the closest we can get to living in real unity. Yet, it can only be grasped if/when we surrender our pride and sin and really live by what Christ has called us to. In my many years of helping people in their hurt or in recovery to transformation and effective ministry, we have all had to rely on the

Vine. People only change when they realize that the pain and challenge of the change is less than the pain and work of staying where they are. Then the sap will flow ever so more!

Our greatest purpose is to build relationships with Him and with others; when we ignore this, we fail in the most important aspects in life, including our relationship in Him!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What kind of produce comes from you? What fruit tree or vine are you like? A crab apple or a golden delicious? A white or wine grape?
2. What does it mean to you that we have a great, loving God who seeks to nourish us? How do you feel that His "sap" is flowing from His love to you?
3. Why does God expect us to bear fruit? What if we do not want to? Consider that He desires what is best for us and this means we need to be cultivated in Him and pruned.
4. How does the better produce of goodness lead to the furtherance of His kingdom? Why do so many Christians forget or refuse to do this?
5. What happens when we refuse His cultivation and nourishment? What does *remain in Him* mean to you? Why is this important?
6. Do you realize that your prime enemy is you, embracing the weeds and pestilence and not Christ the Vine?
7. How does this passage teach you that your relationship with Christ can be beyond deep fellowship; it is not just life, it is life—abundant and triumphant?
8. How have you experienced God? What can you do to commune and dwell in Him more? How would this impact your life?
9. Can you see your role as a child, deeply loved and cared for? How does this help you grow and be faithful to produce fruit? What would that fruit be? What can it be?
10. What does it take to be in Christ and flourish for His glory and our betterment? What gets in the way? How can you be better enabled to thrive and give Him Glory? What do you need? What will you do?
11. What do you need to thrive in Christ and not be infected by the weeds or thorns of faulty desires and the ways of the world that will only hurt you and others?
12. What is defiling you? What do you need to do to accept God's pruning and work in you? What ill thoughts and ways do you have about yourself that need to be tossed out?