

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

The Disciple's Dependence Upon Christ

"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" (John 15:5)

On the night that He was betrayed, as He made His way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus spoke with His disciples about the vine and the branches (John 15:1-8). He told them that God was the vinedresser, He was the true vine, and He helped them understand that they were the branches.

The emphasis of this allegory was not that the disciples produce fruit, but they abide in Christ. "In Me" is found six times in this story, and in verse five Jesus said, "for without Me you can do nothing." Jesus was about to be taken away from them. It was imperative they continue to abide in Him to accomplish the great work He had prepared them to do.

The story of the vine and the branches has much to teach us about discipleship. A disciple is more than a mere student. He is a follower and a supporter. He has a special relationship with his master. The most important relationship that disciples maintain is their relationship with their Master – Jesus Christ. Disciples are related to Christ in a manner comparable to the relationship between a vine and its branches.

The word "abide" means "to stay or remain." It is stated in the present tense, which means it is a continual action. Discipleship is not a hit-and-miss vocation. The branch's life depends upon maintaining a connection with the vine. Likewise a disciple must maintain his connection with Christ in order to stay alive spiritually.

We don't abide in Christ just by becoming a Christian. Abiding is a purposeful, continual action. Specifically, we abide in Christ by following His teaching.

"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" (John 15:10).

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We do not **abide** in Christ...

- by wishing it to happen,
- or with good intentions,
- or even by failing to do evil.

Disciples can only abide in Christ if they **continue** to follow His teaching.

"...If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

"But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5).

"Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him..." (1 John 3:24).

We do not abide in Christ by wishing it to happen, or with good intentions, or even by failing to do evil. Disciples only abide in Christ when they continue to follow His teaching.

Let's consider some lessons on discipleship that we need to learn from the vine and the branches.

If we abide in Christ...

1. We Will Be Like The Vine

Although not stated specifically in this story, we know this must be true from what we know about nature. James asked if a fig tree can bear olives, or if a grapevine can bear figs (James 3:12). The obvious answer is "no." We understand that "like" begets "like."

Branches grow forth from the vine and take on the nature of the vine, just as disciples take on the character of their Master (Luke 6:40). As we abide in His Word, His teachings mold our thoughts, form our character, and control our will. Those who abide in Christ ought to walk just as He walked (1 John 2:6).

2. We Will Bear Fruit

Bearing fruit is also mentioned six times in this passage. As the vinedresser, God is inspecting the branches for fruit (v. 2). Such emphasis makes it clear that God is looking for fruit in our lives.

What is this fruit? Spiritual growth and maturity (2 Pet. 1:5-8, Gal. 5:22-23), increased talents and opportunities (Matt. 25:14-30), good deeds (Matt. 5:16; Eph. 2:10, Titus 3:14), involvement in the work of the gospel (Phil. 4:15-18), winning lost souls (Rom. 1:13), and praise that is offered unto God (Heb. 13:15).

Because of God's help, there is a progression in the quality and quantity of the fruit that is borne. We are to "bear fruit" (v. 2),

we are pruned to “bear more fruit” (v. 2) and we are to “bear much fruit” (v. 8). We are not to rest upon past accomplishments, or become satisfied with our current level of maturity. As disciples, we are expected to grow and produce more fruit.

3. We Will Be Pruned To Bear More Fruit

When we abide in the vine and bear fruit, we are pruned (v. 2). Pruning is very important. An untrimmed vine develops long, green shoots which must be cut off. Otherwise, all the energy and nutrients of the vine go to growing these new branches as opposed to growing fruit.

This pruning had already been done to the disciples, to a certain extent, as they had heard and applied the Lord’s teaching (v. 3). The teachings of Christ cleanse our lives of hindrances and rebellious attitudes if we examine ourselves and make the proper applications.

God will strip away everything in our lives that does not contribute to producing fruit, if we allow Him. God has several ways of “pruning” us. He cleanses us with His word (Ps. 119:9). He disciplines us through His providence (Heb. 12:10-11). He allows us to suffer, knowing that such occasions give us opportunities to mature (James 1:2-4, Rom. 5:3-4). Although it is unpleasant, this pruning process is not a punishment. It is an expression of God’s interest, love, and care. He is helping us to be more fruitful.

4. We Will Remain Connected to the Life-Giving Vine

There is a reason that disciples must continue to abide in Christ. The branches derive their life from the vine. When they are removed from the vine, they will die. Likewise, disciples draw their spiritual life and ability to produce fruit from Christ. When we keep His commandments, we maintain this essential connection to Christ and stay alive spiritually.

As the branches are totally dependent upon the vine, so disciples are totally dependent upon Christ (John 15:4-5). A disciple is nothing without his master. Jesus said, “for without Me you can do nothing” (v. 5). Abiding in Christ is a life-long commitment. No fruit can be produced by an “on again – off again” disciple. This connection to Christ must be maintained.

Failure to abide in Christ and produce fruit invites disaster. Jesus said such branches are taken away, cast out, allowed to wither and die, and cast into the fire and burned (vv. 2, 6). It is

What Kind of Fruit Are We To Produce?

Spiritual Growth And Maturity

- 2 Pet. 1:5-8
- Gal. 5:22-23

Increased Talents And Opportunities

- Matt. 25:14-30

Good Deeds

- Eph. 2:10
- Titus 3:14

Involvement In The Work Of The Gospel

- Phil. 4:15-18

Winning Lost Souls

- Rom. 1:13

Praise Unto God

- Heb. 13:15

obvious that Jesus is speaking of punishment in Hell (Matt. 13:40-42; Rev. 20:14-15). This passage affirms the possibility of apostasy.

5. Our Prayers Will Be Answered

We are not left to ourselves to produce fruit or suffer the consequences of being removed from the vine. God wants us to succeed, and He is ready and willing to help us produce fruit.

“Ask what you desire” (John 17:7). This promise to answer prayer must be kept in the context of this entire passage. Prayer is not a blanket wish-list. Any request by a disciple pertaining to the production of fruit will surely be granted.

However, this promise is conditional: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you...” Prayer is a privilege given to the faithful child of God. If we fail to remain connected to Christ we sever our prayer-line with God.

6. We Will Glorify God

God is glorified when disciples do what they are supposed to do, “bear much fruit” (v. 8). As the vinedresser, the fruit produced is a direct reflection upon God’s planning, efforts, and care.

In a world that is blinded by the darkness of sin and filled with religious hypocrisy, God is truly glorified by those faithful few who stand up and stand out – proving the genuineness of their claim to be disciples by the fruits they produce in their lives. When people see our good works, they will glorify God (Matt. 5:16). A disciple can have no greater goal than to bring glory unto God (1 Cor. 10:31), and no greater satisfaction than to know that God is being glorified before others.

Conclusion

We can learn a lot of lessons about discipleship from the vineyard. Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches. Discipleship is abiding in the teachings of Christ. As we do so, we take on the nature of Christ, produce fruit to God’s glory, receive pruning, maintain our connection to the source of spiritual life, and receive the answers to our prayers.

Questions

1. How many times are the words “in Me” found in John 15:1-8? _____
2. What does the word “abide” mean? _____

3. How does a disciple abide in Christ? Use Scriptures to support your answer. _____

4. Explain how branches are dependent upon the vine, and how this applies to a disciple's relationship with Christ. _____

5. Who are disciples to be like (Luke 6:40)? _____
6. What does God want disciples to produce? _____
7. Why does God prune the fruitful branches (v. 2)? _____
8. How does God cleanse or prune disciples? Provide Scriptures to support your answer. ____

9. What happens to those disciples who fail to produce fruit (v. 2) or fail to abide in Christ (v. 6)? _____

10. What condition does Christ place upon prayer in John 15:7? _____

11. Explain how God is glorified when disciples produce fruit. _____

Match the correct Scripture with the spiritual fruit that we are to produce.

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|---|-------------------|
| ___ Spiritual growth and maturity | a. Eph. 2:10 |
| ___ Increased talents and opportunities | b. Rom. 1:13 |
| ___ Good deeds | c. Phil. 4:15-16 |
| ___ Gospel efforts | d. 2 Pet. 1:5-8 |
| ___ Winning lost souls | e. Heb. 13:15 |
| ___ Praising God | f. Matt. 25:14-30 |