

# ***“Love, Obey, & Abide”***

John 15:1-17

August 17, 2014

**1***“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 bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. **3**“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. **4**“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. **5**“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. **6**“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. **7**“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8**“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. **9**“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; 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. **11**“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*

**12***“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. **13**“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. **14**“You are My friends if you do what I command you. **15**“No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. **16**“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. **17**“This I command you, that you love one another.*

Review:

"There's a fine line between Prophets and Pharisees..." - JDP

\* **Deut. 11 & 12**

\* **Deut. 11:25**

**See Jeremiah 9:23-24....** Let us not boast/trust in.... v.24: "but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am The Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, & righteousness on earth, for in THESE I delight, says The Lord.

\*\*\* Qt: Ironside: \*\*\*(understanding old "vine" as Israel)

*A vine is of very little use other than as a fruit-bearer. You can not build houses with the wood of a vine. You can not make furniture from it. It is of very little use even as fuel, for when cast into the fire it flames up a moment or two, and then it is gone. A vine was intended to bear fruit. God intended Israel to bear fruit for Him to glorify His Name before all the nations of the world. But He says sadly, through the prophet Hosea, "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself." That is, he had gone all to wood and leaves, but there was no real fruit for God. Isaiah pictures the vine in chapter 5, and Jehovah says, "I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes."*

- H.A. Ironside

Abiding = "fruit" and "more fruit"

vv.2-3 = Qt. Life App. study notes:

**15:2, 3** *Jesus makes a distinction between two kinds of pruning: (1) cutting off and (2) cutting back branches. Fruitful branches are cut back to promote growth. In other words, God must sometimes discipline us to strengthen our character and faith. But branches that don't bear fruit are cut off at the trunk not only because they are worthless but also because they often infect the rest of the tree. People who don't bear fruit for God or who try to block the efforts of God's followers will be cut off from his life-giving power.*

vv.5-6 Qt. Life App.

**15:5, 6** *Remaining in Christ means (1) believing that he is God's Son ([1 John 4:15](#)), (2) receiving him as Savior and Lord ([John 1:12](#)), (3) doing what God says ([1 John 3:24](#)), (4) continuing to believe the Good News ([1 John 2:24](#)), and (5) relating in love to the community of believers, Christ's body ([John 15:12](#)).*

v.11 Qt. Life App.

**15:11** *When things are going well, we feel elated. When hardships come, we sink into depression. But true joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstance. Joy comes from a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ. When our lives are intertwined with his, he will help us walk through adversity without sinking*

*into debilitating lows and manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep us levelheaded, no matter how high or low our circumstances.*

v.11 = KEY: Jesus has thus far promised to give His true followers:

- A. His Spirit
- B. His Peace
- C. His Joy

v.16 Qt. Life Application Notes:

*15:16 Jesus made the first choice—to love and to die for us, to invite us to live with him forever. We make the next choice—to accept or reject his offer. Without his choice, we would have no choice to make.*

## **KEY TERMS in the PASSAGE**

1. (I Am) + (true) + Vine
2. Vine-dresser
3. (every) Branch
4. Bear (fruit)
5. Fruit
6. Takes-away
7. Prune
8. More
9. (already) Clean
10. Abide

11. Nothing
12. Thrown away
13. (into) the Fire
14. (and) burned
15. (My) words
16. Glorified
17. Prove
18. Love(d)
19. Obey
20. Joy
21. Full
22. Commandment
23. One-another
24. As-I-Have
25. Lay-down-his-life
26. Friend(s)
27. If
28. Servant(s)
29. No-longer
30. Call (you)
31. Know(n)
32. Choose/Chose
33. Appointed
34. Should
35. Go
36. Whatever
37. (you) Ask
38. Give
39. In-My-name
40. These-things
41. So-that
42. You

\*\*\* "What do you do with Ghandi? How can Jesus use the word: 'nothing' when it appears that Ghandi has does a lot of good without the God of "all good" - the One true God of the Gospel?"

\*\*\* Jesus came to seek & save the lost... WE (true Christians) are to find the lost He is seeking... and grow those He is saving! - JDP

Abide in me = John 10 (no one can snatch out if My hand) & Romans 8:30... Combine this with the beginning of John 15 ("the branch that was IN the vine... taken away and thrown into the fire...). We must realize, in full context, that Jesus is not saying that some lose their salvation. No! Rather, He is saying that some who "look" like living branches (in the Vine) are, in actuality, "dead" branches that are connected mechanically vs miraculously.

\*\*\* **CRITICAL POINT**: the disciples are the branches in focus as Jesus is speaking (and the Church/church are the branches He is describing throughout history). With that said, DON'T MISS THIS... Judas is once again being highlighted (as yet another cautionary example), to the extent that JUDAS IS THE DEAD BRANCH that "looked" faithful but was really fruitless!

\*\*\* **"Beware the dead branches and their plastic fruit!"** \*\*\* - JDP

**"The emperor has no clothes"** = great illustration to depict those merely mechanically (vs. miraculously) connected to Christ...

***"YOU can change your habits... but only GOD can change your heart."*** – JDP

Romans 8 = Spirit ref. 21X

Abide = John 10 (no one can snatch out of My hand... + Romans 8:35-39)

"Abiding = unifying with more than holiness... Abiding is living unified with & IN the Holy One!" - JDP

Abiding controls BOTH what you believe AND how you behave!

God speaks thru John on HOW to TELL the BRANCHES apart:

**John 3:19-21 =**

**John = "My sheep hear My voice and FOLLOW Me..."**

**1 John 3:10 =**

**1 John 2:3-6...**

God speaks thru other biblical authors as well:

Phil. 4:6 = peace... In Christ

James... "faith without works" Ditto

Col. 1 = peace with God via abiding

**2 Cor. 5:17&21 = "in Christ"/abide** (ultimate example!)

### ***Union and/or Communion***

- Union is unsnatchable...
- Communion is

Abide = Obey... ILLUSTRATION

- 63 yr old student “beneficiary”

### **Biblical EXAMPLES of DEAD Branches:**

- Acts 5... Ananias. & Saphira
- 1 Cor. 5
- Matthew 18
- Titus 1:16 (and ch.2 & 3)
- Matthew 7:21-23 & 2 houses
- Jude (clouds w/out rain)
- Paul's traitors
- 1 John.... + 2:19
- JUDAS

**QT:        “Now this has happened, this great tragedy has happened, simply because we haven’t followed the Biblical example and preach law to the proud and grace to the humble. Always, when you see Jesus approach a proud arrogant self-righteous person with the gospel, He gave law before grace. Always. With the law He broke the hard heart, with the gospel He healed the broken heart.” - Ray Comfort**

**\*\*\* See pdf: “True & False Conversion” \*\*\***

**We all need to make a careful examination of our own lives as to fruit-bearing.** Most of us immediately think about what we have been doing for the Lord—how many people we have won to Christ or whatever. A preacher received a letter from a girl who was in a state of "spiritual distress" because she had never won anyone to Christ—after all, Christ had promised that she would be fruitful.

**Souls can be fruit.** I think that was what Paul was referring to in [Romans 1:13](#): "I planned many times to come to you... in order that I might have a harvest among you." But that is not what Jesus had in mind in [John 15](#).

**I will sing to the one I love a song about his vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.**

**Now you dwellers of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.**

**What more could I have done for my vineyard than I have done for it?**

**When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?**

**Now I will tell you**

**what I am going to do to my vineyard.**

**I will take away its hedge,**

**I will break down its wall,**

**and it will be trampled. ([Isaiah 5:1-5](#))**

**What was this "bad fruit,"** these worthless grapes? "And he [God] looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" ([John 15:7](#)). The fruits he was looking for were the qualities of justice and righteousness, inner qualities.

*Similarly, in [John 15](#) the fruit Jesus speaks of is not primarily evangelism but simply the reproduction of the life of the vine in the branch. Jesus is looking for the fruit of his life in us. If the inward graces of the Holy Spirit are not present in our lives ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," [Galatians 5:22-23](#)), if these qualities are not present (not perfected but present) in our lives, we must face the fact that we may not be true believers. There must be something of the life of the vine in us if we belong to God! There must be Christlikeness. This is a tougher test than outward fruit such as the number of souls saved, people influenced, or money collected. **It is possible to have the outward signs without having the life of Christ within.** Furthermore, the inward graces of the Spirit will in time bring the outward fruit. The fruit Christ looks for is his own life in us. The question is, how do we get it?*

### **Pruning for Fruit (V. 2-3)**

"...every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" ([John 15:2b](#)). *The branches that are doing well, those that best convey the life of the vine, get the knife.* Anyone who has ever driven through the great northern California vineyards understands what the Lord is talking about. In the winter all you see for miles is bare, twisted trunks. But in the summer, what meets the eye are endless rows of lush green grapevines expanding their foliage so fast you can almost see them grow. **Their health is directly proportionate to their pruning. A grapevine will never produce anywhere near its potential without being pruned!**

*Pruning is a drastic process. To the uninitiated eye it looks cruel and wasteful, but to the experienced eye it is the only way to grow healthy, delicious fruit. The same is true in the Christian life.*

*What is involved in pruning? Pain. Pruning always hurts!*

**Sometimes the pain of pruning comes because of our sins. Other times it is simply because we are bearing abundant fruit and God wants us to bear more.** Whatever the reason for pruning, our natural selves always want to escape it. No one naturally wants the knife.

QT: *Without pruning, a vineyard would never be in full bloom.*

Malcolm Muggeridge in his book *Jesus Rediscovered* says:

*Suppose you eliminated suffering, what a dreadful place the world would be. I would almost rather eliminate happiness. The world would be the most ghastly place because everything that corrects the tendency of this unspeakable little creature, man, to feel over-important and over-pleased with himself would disappear. He's bad enough now, but he would be absolutely intolerable if he never suffered.*

- Preaching the Word - Kent Hughes

IN CHAPTER 14 the answer to Jesus' departure was resolved in the assurance of his coming, that he would not leave his disciples desolate ([14:18](#)). *In chapter 15 Jesus' theme is no longer "coming" but "remaining."* He paints an intricate picture of a vine trimmed by its gardener that produces generous fruit. He applies this image to his *disciples, charging them to remain vitally attached to him so that they may produce the fruit borne of love and obedience.*

Jesus is looking at the lives of the believers who will live in the world following his departure (the church). His interest here is not dissimilar to that in [John 14](#). *The interior life of intimacy with God described in 14:23 is now posed in a new form: "Remain in me, and I will remain in you" (15:4a).*

Jesus takes the image of a vineyard and transforms it into an extended metaphor ([15:1-8](#)), followed by an interpretation and application ([15:9-11](#))

**The vine and the vineyard were old and sacred images in Judaism (as in most Mediterranean societies). The vine represented the covenant people of God, planted and tended by Him so that Israel would produce fruit ([Ps. 80:8-18](#); [Isa. 5:1-7](#); [Jer. 2:21](#); [12:10-11](#); [Ezek. 15:1-5](#); [17:1-6](#); [19:10-14](#); [Hos. 10:1-2](#)). Generally in the Old Testament when Israel is depicted as a vine or vineyard, the nation is being chastised for not bearing fruit as God expects.**

Restore us, O God Almighty;  
make your face shine upon us,  
that we may be saved.  
You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it.  
You cleared the ground for it,  
and it took root and filled the land. ([Ps. 80:7-9](#))

***But here in [John 15](#) he makes a departure. In his final "I am" saying in this Gospel, Jesus declares that he is the true vine ([15:1](#)). That is, in this ancient imagery he has taken the place of Israel as God's true planting. The new concept is that God's vineyard holds one vine and Israel must inquire if it is attached to him. No longer is Israel automatically seen as vines growing in God's vineyard.***

Men and women are now branches growing from one stock. The picture of attachment to Jesus as a branch is attached to a vine is an apt description of the interior spiritual life Jesus has described since chapter 14. Here, however, the key word is "remaining" or "abiding" (Gk. meno), which is used throughout the discourse (15:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10). The growing disciple in whom the Father and Son live (14:20, 23) through the Spirit (14:16, 25; 15:26) is one whose life is utterly dependent on Christ.

Discipleship is not just a matter of acknowledging who Jesus is; it is having Jesus spiritually connected to our inner lives.

That connection also means being "pruned" (15:2b). The Greek word for trimming (kathairo) is closely related to the adjective in 15:3, "You are already clean [Gk. katharos] because of the word I have spoken to you." Those who remain in the vine (such as Jesus' disciples) are being readied for more fruit-bearing by the word Jesus is giving them.

But with this comes a warning (15:6). To fail to "remain" in Christ, to fail to find life in the vine (i.e., Jesus), risks separation from the vineyard and consequent destruction. There is only one evidence if a branch is truly alive: Does it produce clusters of grapes (15:5)? Note carefully, however, what the metaphor is not saying. Fruit-bearing is not a test; that is, a branch does not have to demonstrate a level of productivity to be safe from destruction. Rather, fruit-bearing is a byproduct. "Apart from me you can do nothing" (15:5b). To be connected to the vine means that the life of Jesus is flowing through us, and this leads to fruitfulness. Fruitfulness will be the inevitable outcome of an interior spiritual life with Jesus...

**Verse 7** compares remaining in Jesus and remaining in his word. No doubt this recalls the commands to obedience (**14:15**; **15:10**), in which keeping Jesus' word is how we demonstrate love for him. Those whose lives are so in harmony with Jesus will find their prayers controlled by his word, and such prayers will be answered and bring added glory to God (**15:7b**; cf. **14:10-12**). The branch produces what the life coursing through its limbs desires, that is, the "fruit of the vine." But the outcome is not a mechanical productivity of fruit. The disciple steps into a relationship of love with both Jesus (**15:9**) and the Father (**15:10**), out of which a transformed life, a fruit-bearing life, will flow.

**The "peace" promised in 14:27 is now matched to "joy" in 15:11.** **Note that this joy is not merely a human happiness. Jesus desires "that *my joy* may be in you" (italics added). It is likewise a gift of the Spirit, a gift of Jesus dwelling within, that makes this joy supernatural and substantial.**

**In 15:12 the subject shifts to the character of life among Jesus' followers. In chapter 13 we viewed the same shift: Jesus models and describes his work on their behalf (13:1-11) and then charges them to imitate what he has done (13:12-20). Having described the life-giving vine and our need to share in his life and love in order to live, Jesus moves on to describe life among the branches. For some scholars, these six verses are the center of Jesus' Farewell Discourse. Note that the unit is framed by two statements of the love command (15:12, 17).**

**This is the second time that Jesus has commanded his followers to love one another (cf. [13:34](#)). This is the true test that will always put his followers in high relief ([13:35](#)). The same theme is sounded throughout the letters of John.** "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" ([1 John 4:11-12](#)). Such love for one another is a fulfillment of God's love for us and in us ([4:17](#)), and to refuse to love leads John to describe such people as "liars" —people who show that they have neither seen or experienced God's love ([4:20](#)).

**This human love cannot be viewed in isolation, as if simply exhibiting such love satisfies the call to discipleship. Such love is an outgrowth of a life that has witnessed the dramatic quality of God's love ([15:13](#)) when his Son died on behalf of those he loves. Such love requires that we also love God with our entire heart, soul, and, strength ([Deut. 6:5](#)).**

Jesus now calls his disciples "friends" ([15:14-15](#)) to distinguish them from servants, who do not know the deeper thoughts of their masters. **What characterizes such friends is that they obey him. In the Old Testament both Abraham ([2 Chron. 20:7](#); [Isa. 41:8](#); cf. [Jas. 2:23](#)) and Moses ([Ex. 33:11](#)) are called friends of God.** This title is unusual and speaks of the highest relationship possible between God and a human being. This friendship is not our doing; rather, Jesus chooses us as friends ([15:16a](#)), which gives us tremendous security that his affection for us will not disappear.

**Where true friendship exists, true disclosure (or revelation) accompanies it ([15:15b](#)).**

Disciples possess the word of Jesus (thanks to the Spirit, [14:25-26](#)), and they will receive ongoing revelations of Jesus (also brought by the Spirit, [16:12-13](#)). Disciples thus know "God's heart." When they therefore pray, their desires and God's will harmonize, making them participants in God's efforts in the world ([15:16](#); cf. [15:7](#)).

#### BRIDGING Contexts:

IN THIS CHAPTER (as in [John 14](#)) Jesus is speaking directly to the needs and experiences of disciples who will believe in him following his departure. It is important to recall his audience: He is surrounded by his closest followers. This provides the chapter with an immediacy and applicability for the church today. These words are guidelines for discipleship, instructions for how the disciple (and the church) ought to live out life in a world that is at odds with God's Word but nevertheless in need of it.

**Christian experience.** This chapter places in sharp relief our definition of the Christian experience. Is discipleship a commitment to doctrinal beliefs concerning God and Jesus? Is it a way of life, a way of "love" perhaps, that sets disciples apart from the world? Or is it an experience, a mystical spiritual encounter that transforms? I believe **it is all three: Discipleship is a way of thinking (doctrine), a way of living (ethics), and a supernatural experience that cannot be compared with anything in the world.**

ILLUSTRATION: Christians = 3-legged stools

**John 15 emphasizes that neither doctrine nor ethics can alone define Christian discipleship. It reminds us that remaining in Christ, having an interior experience of Jesus (as a branch is nourished and strengthened by a vine), is a nonnegotiable feature of following Jesus. Many words could be used to describe this: mysticism, interiority, spiritual encounter. But without some dimension of an interior experience of the reality of Jesus, without a transforming spirituality that creates a supernatural life, doctrine and ethics lose their value.**

**This theme of spiritual experience will be at home to some but foreign and threatening to others. What will this experience look like? How is it measured or quantified?**

**The vineyard metaphor. The third theme in this chapter, often left unnoticed, would have been explosive in Jesus' day. When Jesus employs the vineyard metaphor, he is touching one of the most-used images in Judaism to express God's relationship with his people. We saw that instead of describing God's people as planted vines rooted in the soil of Israel, Jesus describes them as branches attached to himself, the one true vine. Something important has happened here. God's people are defined not as people now planted in the vineyard of Israel, but as people attached to Jesus.**

**Now the vineyard consists of *one vine*, and the question for God's people is no longer, "Do I live in the vineyard?" but instead, "Am I attached to Jesus, the vine?"**

CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE:

**Anyone wishing to bring [John 15](#) to a modern audience must think carefully about what the text of the chapter is saying and what it is not saying about our identity as Christians.**

**Spiritual attachment:** How does somebody become a Christian anyway? It is interesting to pause for a moment and answer this question thoughtfully.

Of course, our traditions provide us with a theological starting point, be they Arminian or Calvinist in orientation... Discipleship here is viewed in terms of attachment and fruit-bearing. The believer is like a living branch attached to a living vine. It is the vine that gives life to the branch. Nourishment from the vine enables the branch to bear good fruit. *How one becomes attached (MIRACLE!) is not the issue. But that one must be attached, that one will bear fruit as a result of this attachment, means everything.*

**This means that Christianity is not simply about believing the right things (though this is important). Nor is it simply a matter of living a Christ-like life (though this is important too). Christian experience must necessarily have a mystical, spiritual, non-quantifiable dimension. To be a disciple means having the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit living in us ([14:23-26](#)). It means having a supernatural, interior experience that is completely unlike anything available in the world. It is a way of believing (doctrine) and a way of living (ethics), but these are nurtured by the life-giving connection with Jesus Christ. Today's world is not hardened in a rigid demand for rationalistic religious proof as it was in another generation. It is bona fide spiritual experience that authenticates religious truth in our world, and this is precisely what Jesus is describing.**

**What are the outcomes of this sort of life? The fruit Jesus expects from the branches is first and foremost love. The love command has been repeated throughout this Upper Room discourse, and Jesus repeats it here (15:12).**

**This spiritual awakening, this transforming encounter does not always lead to fantastic signs and powers (though these may come, cf. 14:12). It leads principally to a life that has features of Jesus' life running through its veins. As Jesus enjoyed the Father's love and reflected it to his followers, so now his love should fill their lives. Fruit then becomes a sign of spiritual life and vitality**

The confident prayer described in [15:17](#) is a byproduct of the intimacy with Jesus offered in [15:15-16](#). To be a branch, to be a disciple, does not mean that we can make some claim on the vine and demand it to produce what we wish. Prayer "in my name" is not a formula that guarantees we will get what we want.

ETERNAL SECURITY:

**Can branches be broken off? This is the clear teaching of 15:2, 6. But does this mean that branches once nourished by the vine (i.e., disciples once saved) can then lose their salvation and be removed from Christ? Jesus' analogy here has not been missed in recent theological debates about assurance and faith. Zane Hodges of Dallas Seminary, for instance, attempts to shore up eternal security by arguing that it is possible to be genuinely saved but bear no fruit. Others have disputed this view strongly.**

**What are our options on this issue? (1) Arminians have often argued that the removed branches are Christians who have lost faith and hence lost salvation. But this seems hard to square with passages like [John 10:28](#): "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." (2) Some have suggested that breaking off branches depicts Christian discipline (death perhaps?), aimed at bringing restoration in the end. But the description in [15:6](#) seems to evoke images of eternal judgment ("such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned"). (3) A third view argues that these branches are people who have some superficial external identity with Jesus but no internal, spiritual unity with him. Throughout John's Gospel we have met people who are interested in Jesus but show inadequate belief ([12:41-43](#)). They live on the margin of the community of faith and enjoy its activities, but they have not embraced its truth for themselves.**

**We have already seen that the vineyard was one of Israel's most prized historic symbols of its nationhood and inheritance. In the Synoptic Gospels, for example, Jesus uses this symbol to express judgment in the parable of the vineyard and the tenants ([Matt. 21:33-44](#); [Mark 12:1-11](#)): "'Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time'" ([Matt. 21:40-41](#)). Imagine the explosive implications of this answer! The vineyard will be given to new people, who will be faithful tenants!**

- NIV Application Commentary

## MACARTHUR COMMENTARY: (John 15:1-11)

The Bible uses many analogies to depict God's relationship to His people. He is their Father ([Matt. 6:9](#); [Rom. 1:7](#)), they are His children ([John 1:12](#); [Rom. 8:16-17,21](#); [Phil. 2:15](#); [1 John 3:1-2](#); cf. [Rom. 8:14,19](#); [Gal. 3:26](#); [4:6](#); [Heb. 12:7](#)) and the members of His household ([Eph.2:19](#); [1 Tim. 3:15](#); [1 Peter 4:17](#)); He is their King, they are His subjects ([Matt. 25:34](#)); He is the Creator, they are His creatures ([Pss. 24:1](#); [95:6](#); [100:3](#); [119:73](#); [139:13](#); [Eccl. 12:1](#); [Eph. 2:10](#)); He is the Shepherd, they are His sheep ([Pss. 23:1](#); [28:9](#); [79:13](#); [95:7](#); [100:3](#); [Isa. 40:11](#); [John 10:11,14,26](#); [Heb. 13:20](#); [1 Peter 2:25](#); [5:4](#)); He is the builder, they are the building ([Eph. 2:20-22](#); [Heb. 3:4](#)); He is the master, they are His slaves ([Matt. 10:24-25](#); [Rom. 14:4](#); [Eph. 6:9](#); [Col. 4:1](#); [2 Tim. 2:21](#); [Jude 4](#)); Christ is their husband, they are His bride ([2 Cor. 11:2](#); [Rev. 19:7](#); [21:9](#); cf. [Isa. 54:5](#); [Jer. 31:32](#)); He is the head, they are His body ([Eph. 1:22-23](#); [4:15](#); [Col. 1:18](#); [2:19](#)).

Believers' vital relationship with Jesus Christ is depicted in this passage in another familiar analogy Just as a branch depends entirely on the vine for life, sustenance, growth, and fruit, so believers depend completely on the divine Lord as the source of their spiritual life and effect. And just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is connected to the vine, so believers cannot bear spiritual fruit apart from their life-giving union with Christ. As He said in [verse 5](#), "Apart from Me you can do nothing."

**The central truth the Lord wanted to communicate in this symbol is the importance of abiding in Him (vv. 4,5,6,7,9,10). In the most basic sense, whether or not a person abides in Christ reveals whether they are saved (vv. 2,6). It must be noted that this simple and, I think, obvious premise rescues the text from many unnecessary misinterpretations. And it is only to the degree the redeemed abide in Christ that they can bear spiritual fruit.** Those principles will be more fully developed in the exposition that follows.

**Menō ("abide") describes something that remains where it is, continues in a fixed state, or endures. In this context the word refers to maintaining an unbroken communion with Jesus Christ. The Lord's command "Abide in Me" (v. 4) is primarily a plea to false disciples of Christ to repent and express true faith in Him. It also serves to encourage genuine believers to abide in Him in the fullest, deepest, most complete sense.**

**Jesus wove all the key figures of that night's events into His analogy: He is the vine, the Father the vinedresser, the abiding branches illustrate the eleven and all other true disciples, and the nonabiding branches picture Judas and all other false disciples like him. One last time before His death, Jesus warned against following the pattern of Judas. He challenged all who claim to believe in Him to demonstrate the genuineness of their faith by enduring faith in Him.**

**The Vine:**      *I am the true vine... I am the vine ([vv. 1a, 5a](#))*

Spoken just hours before His death, this is the last of the seven "I AM" statements in John's gospel, all of which affirm Christ's deity ([6:35](#); [8:12](#); [10:7,9,11,14](#); [11:25](#); [14:6](#); cf. [8:24,28,58](#); [13:19](#); [18:5-6](#)). As God in human flesh, Jesus rightly pointed to Himself as the source of spiritual life, vitality, growth, and productivity

**But Israel proved to be a fruitless, unfaithful vine.** The Old Testament laments Israel's failure to produce good fruit and warns of God's impending judgment. In [Jeremiah 2:21](#) *God demanded of the nation, "How then have you turned yourself before Me into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?"* In Hosea He lamented, "Israel is a luxuriant vine; he produces fruit for himself. The more his fruit, the more altars he made; the richer his land, the better he made the sacred pillars" ([Hos. 10:1](#); cf. [Isa. 27:2-6](#); [Jer. 12:10-13](#); [Ezek. 15:1-8](#); [19:10-14](#))

Nowhere in the Old Testament is Israel's faithless rejection of God's gracious, tender care more poignantly depicted than in [Isaiah 5:1-7](#):

### Israel's apostasy made it an empty vine

*Alēthinos* (**true**) refers to what is real as distinct from a type (cf. [Heb. 8:2](#); [9:24](#)), perfect as distinct from the imperfect, or genuine rather than what is counterfeit (cf. [1 Thess. 1:9](#); [1 John 5:20](#); [Rev. 3:7, 14](#); [6:10](#); [19:11](#)). Jesus is the true vine in the same sense that He is the true light ([John 1:9](#)), the final and complete revelation of spiritual truth, and the true bread out of heaven ([John 6:32](#)), the final and only source of spiritual sustenance.

**The Vinedresser:**      *My Father is the vinedresser. ([v. 1b](#))*

That Jesus designates the **Father** as **the vinedresser** while assigning Himself the role of the vine is in no way a denial of His deity and full equality with the Father. During His incarnation, without diminishing His deity one iota, Jesus willingly assumed a subordinate role to the Father

Metaphorically speaking, the vinedresser had two primary responsibilities in caring for it. First, he removed the branches that did not bear fruit. Second, he pruned the ones that did bear fruit, thus enabling them to bear more fruit. It is with those two types of branches that the rest of Christ's analogy is primarily concerned.

### **The Vine Branches:**

*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 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. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."*  
([15:2-11](#))

**The two types of branches represent the two types of disciples outwardly professing attachment to Jesus: the genuine branches that abide in Him, and the false branches that do not.**

### **The Blessings of Abiding Branches ([vv.2b-5; 7-11](#))**

**Three distinguishing marks of the true branches stand out in this analogy. First, they bear fruit ([vv. 2,4,5,8](#)). That characteristic most clearly sets them apart from the false branches (cf. [vv. 2,8](#)). Second, they also abide (remain; continue) in Christ's love ([v. 9](#)). Finally, they operate in full cooperation with the source of life, keeping His commandments**

**As Jesus had earlier told those who professed faith in Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine" (John 8:31). Obedience proves that a person's love for Christ is genuine (John 14:15,21,23), a point John makes clear in his first epistle: believers confess their sins (1:9), unbelievers deny them (1:8,10); believers obey God's commandments (2:3), unbelievers do not (2:4); believers demonstrate love for others (2:10), unbelievers do not (2:9,11); believers live in patterns of righteous (3:6), unbelievers do not (3:9).**

**But that does not mean that those who love Christ will always obey perfectly; there are times when we lapse into disobedience and fail to abide fully in Christ. Paul admonished the Corinthians,**

**I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Cor. 3:1-3)**

**Jesus rebuked the Ephesian church for its diminished devotion to Him: "I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Rev. 2:4). John, after making the absolute statement "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin," immediately added "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). Therefore the Lord's exhortation to abide in Him is appropriate not only for unbelievers, but also to remind and warn believers who are not abiding in Him in the fullest sense**

## **PRUNING in Context:**

Because He wants them to be spiritually productive, the Father takes **every branch that bears fruit** and **prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.** *Pruning*

*was... an essential part of first-century viticultural practice, as it is today. The first pruning occurred in spring when vines were in flowering stage. This involved four operations: (1) the removal of the growing tips of vigorous shoots so that they would not grow too rapidly; (2) cutting off one or two feet from the end of growing shoots to prevent entire shoots being snapped off by the wind; (3) the removal of some flower or grape clusters so that those left could produce more and better-quality fruit; and (4) the removal of suckers that arose from below the ground or from the trunk and main branches so that the strength of the vine was not tapped by the suckers. (Colin Kruse, *The Gospel According to John, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 315)**

The Father prunes the true branches by removing anything that would sap their spiritual energy and hinder them from fruitful results. His pruning involves cutting away anything that limits righteousness, including the discipline that comes from trials, suffering, and persecution. The knowledge that the Father uses the pain that Christians endure for their ultimate good should eliminate all fear, self-pity, and complaining. The classic text in Hebrews reminds those undergoing God's painful, pruning chastening,

*It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. ([Heb. 12:7-11](#); cf. [1 Cor. 11:32](#))*

In the Father's infinite wisdom and absolute, sovereign control of all of life's circumstances, He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" ([Rom. 8:28](#);

**You are already clean, Jesus told the eleven true disciples, because of the word which I have spoken to you. Because they had embraced the gospel through Christ's teaching, the eleven had been regenerated by the Holy Spirit (cf. [John 3:3-8](#); [Titus 3:4-7](#)).... God uses His Word as the pruning knife, because it "is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" ([Heb. 4:12](#))... The psalmist affirmed the connection between affliction and the Word's work in his life when he wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.... It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" ([Ps. 119:67, 71](#)). [Psalm 94:12](#) also makes that connection: "Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O Lord, and whom You teach out of Your law"**

**The Lord's words emphasize two important truths regarding spiritual conduct: Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. First, since all true believers, those who abide in Christ and He in them, will bear spiritual fruit, there is no such thing as a fruitless Christian. John the Baptist challenged his hearers to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8), and warned that "every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (v. 10). Contrasting true and false teachers, Jesus said, "Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:17-20). In Luke 6:43 He added, "There is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit."**

*Second, believers cannot bear fruit on their own, because as He plainly stated, As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing (cf. Hos. 14:8). There may be times when believers have lapses, when they fail to be faithful to their life in Christ. But true branches, through whom the life of the vine flows, cannot ultimately fail to produce fruit (cf. Pss. 1:1-3; 92:12-14; Prov. 11:30; 12:12; Jer. 17:7-8; Matt. 13:23; Rom. 7:4; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:9; Phil 1:11; Col. 1:10; James 3:17).*

*A popular misconception equates fruit with outward success. By that common standard, external religion, superficial righteousness, having a large church, a popular ministry, or a successful program are considered fruitful. But the Bible nowhere equates fruit with superficial, external behavior or results, which deceivers and hypocrites, as well as non-Christian cults and religions can duplicate. Instead, Scripture defines fruit in terms of spiritual qualities. "The fruit of the Spirit," Paul reminded the Galatians, "is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)). Those Christlike traits mark those through whom His life flows.*

*Praise offered to God is also fruit. The writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" ([Heb. 13:15](#); cf. [Isa. 57:19](#); [Hos. 14:2](#)).*

*The Bible also identifies sacrificial love in meeting the needs of others as fruit. Referring to the monetary gift he was collecting for the needy believers at Jerusalem, Paul wrote to the Romans, "Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain" ([Rom. 15:28](#)). Acknowledging the Philippians' financial support of his ministry, Paul told them, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account" ([Phil. 4:17](#) NKJV). Supporting others who are in need is a tangible expression of love, which is one of the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22](#)).*

*Fruit may also be defined as holy righteous, God-honoring behavior in general. Such conduct is "fruit in keeping with repentance" ([Matt. 3:8](#)); the fruit produced by the good soil ([Matt. 13:23](#)) of a transformed life; the "fruit of the Light [that] consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth" ([Eph. 5:9](#)); the "fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" ([Phil. 1:11](#)); the "peaceful fruit of righteousness" ([Heb. 12:11](#)).*

Paul prayed that the Colossians would be continually "bearing fruit in every good work" (Col. 1:10), because Christians were "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Finally, the Bible defines fruit as converts to the gospel—not the artificial fruit of superficial "believers," but genuine disciples who abide in the true vine. Referring to the Samaritans who were coming out to Him from the village of Sychar, many of whom would believe savingly in Him (John 4:39,41), Jesus said, "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (v. 36). He declared of His sacrificial death, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24).

**Righteous obedience is the key to experiencing God's blessing.**

The crowning blessing, to which all the rest contribute, is full and complete joy. The Lord promised to impart to believers His **joy**—the joy that He shares in intimate fellowship with the Father. **These things I have spoken to you, Jesus said to the eleven, so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.** The Lord promised that His own joy will permeate and control the lives of those who walk in communion with Him. Just a short time later, Jesus reiterated this promise in His High Priestly Prayer to the Father: "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves" ([John 17:13](#)).

## The Burning of Non-Abiding Branches

*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away;... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.*

*([2a](#), [6](#))*

*A very different fate awaits the branches that do not bear fruit. Because they are detrimental to the health of the vine, the vinedresser would cut off the dry, lifeless, withered branches. In the Lord's analogy, the vinedresser (the Father) takes the unregenerate false branches away from their superficial attachment to the vine, and they are thrown away.*

**The reference here is not, as some imagine, to true Christians losing their salvation, nor are these fruitless but genuine Christians (an impossibility, as we have seen). That these branches bear no fruit marks them as unbelieving, false disciples since, as noted previously, all true Christians bear fruit. Further, Jesus promised that He will not cast out any true disciples: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" ([John 6:37](#)).**

*The phrase in Me in this case cannot have the Pauline connotation of believers' union with Christ; it merely describes those who outwardly attach themselves to Him (cf. [Matt. 13:20-22](#); [Rom. 9:6-8](#); [11:16-24](#); [1 John 2:19](#)).*

*Such people will always be present with the true church. The New Testament describes them as tares among the wheat ([Matt. 13:25-30](#)); bad fish that are thrown away ([Matt. 13:48](#)); goats condemned to eternal punishment ([Matt. 25:33,41](#)); those left standing outside when the head of the house shuts the door ([Luke 13:25-27](#)); foolish virgins shut out of the wedding feast ([Matt. 25:1-12](#)); useless slaves who bury their master's talent in the ground ([Matt. 25:24-30](#)); apostates who eventually leave the fellowship of believers ([1 John 2:19](#)), manifest an evil, unbelieving heart by abandoning the living God ([Heb. 3:12](#)), continue to sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth ([Heb. 10:26](#)), and fall away from the truth to everlasting destruction ([Heb. 10:39](#)). Although they imagine that they are on their way to heaven, they are actually on the broad path leading to hell ([Matt. 7:13-14](#)).*

*Right in their presence was the quintessential example of a false branch—Judas Iscariot.*

*The ultimate fate that awaits the false branches is to be cast... into the fire and... burned. In [Matthew 13:49-50](#) Jesus warned that "at the end of the age the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (cf. [Matt. 3:10-12](#); [7:19](#); [25:41](#); [Mark 9:43-48](#); [Luke 3:17](#)). Their anguished protest, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" ([Matt. 7:22](#)) will evoke the chilling reply from the Lord, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" ([v. 23](#)).*

*The Lord's sobering pronouncement concerning Judas, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" ([Matt. 26:24](#)), applies to all pseudodisciples. In the words of Peter...*

*If, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them ([2 Peter 2:20-21](#)).*

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary,

MACARTHUR COMMENTARY: (John 15:12-16)

**Intro:** In a world awash in relativism, the Bible is unique in both its clarity and authority Where many people see gray God's Word speaks in terms that are black and white. The Bible is absolute, definitive, and provocative, unconcerned with political correctness and therefore unafraid to confront people with the reality of their condition. As a result, Scripture makes stark contrasts between those who are saved and those who are lost ([Luke 19:10](#)); those who are with Jesus and those who are against Him ([Luke 11:23](#)); those in the world and those not in the world ([John 15:19](#); [17:14,16](#); cf. [1 John 2:15-17](#)); those who are children of God and those who are children of the Devil ([1 John 3:10](#)); those in the kingdom of God's beloved Son, and those in the satanic kingdom of darkness ([Col. 1:13](#)).

In this passage, Jesus introduces another aspect of this contrast— between those who are His friends, and those who are friends of the world. Friendship with Jesus Christ results in an intimate relationship with God and brings "joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). On the other hand, "friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4) and is subject to His wrath (Nah. 1:2).

In this passage, Jesus introduces another aspect of this contrast— between those who are His friends, and those who are friends of the world. Friendship with Jesus Christ results in an intimate relationship with God and brings "joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). On the other hand, "friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4) and is subject to His wrath (Nah. 1:2).

The Bible calls those who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ by many names and titles. Those titles include believers ([Acts 5:14](#); [1 Thess. 1:7](#); [2:10](#)); beloved of God ([Rom. 1:7](#)); beloved brethren ([1 Cor. 15:58](#); [Phil. 4:1](#); [James 1:16](#)); the called ([Rom. 1:6](#)); children of God ([John 1:12](#); [11:52](#); [Phil. 2:15](#); [1 John 3:1-2](#)); children of promise ([Gal. 4:28](#)); children of light ([Eph. 5:8](#); cf. [1 Thess. 5:5](#)); sons of the resurrection ([Luke 20:36](#)); Christians ([Acts 11:26](#); [1 Peter 4:16](#)); disciples ([Acts 6:1-2](#); [11:26](#)); the elect ([Matt. 24:22,24,31](#); [Luke 18:7](#); [Rom. 8:33](#)); the godly ([2 Peter 2:9](#)); heirs of God ([Rom. 8:17](#); [Gal. 4:7](#); cf. [James 2:5](#); [1 Peter 3:7](#)); heirs of promise ([Gal. 3:29](#); [Heb. 6:17](#)); heirs of salvation ([Heb. 1:14](#) KJV); the righteous ([Hab. 2:4](#); [Matt. 13:43](#); [25:46](#); [Luke 14:14](#); [Rom. 1:17](#); [Heb. 12:23](#)); lights in the world ([Phil. 2:15](#); cf. [Matt. 5:14](#)); living stones ([1 Peter 2:5](#)); members of the body of Christ ([Eph. 5:30](#)); people of God ([Heb. 11:25](#); [1 Peter 2:10](#)); a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession ([1 Peter 2:9](#)); the salt of the earth ([Matt. 5:13](#)); slaves of Christ ([1 Cor. 7:22](#); [Eph. 6:6](#)); slaves of righteousness ([Rom. 6:18](#)); vessels for honor ([2 Tim. 2:21](#)); vessels of mercy ([Rom. 9:23](#)); and saints ([Acts 9:13](#); [Rom. 1:7](#); [1 Cor. 1:2](#); [Col. 1:12](#)).

*But "friend" captures a unique aspect of communion with the Lord. They are those who love each other, obey Him, know divine truth, and have been specially chosen by the Lord Himself.*

### **The Friends of Jesus Love Each Other**

*This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his Mends.*  
([15:12-13](#))

**For the second time that evening in the upper room, Jesus gave the commandment that His followers are to love one another (cf. [13:34](#)).**

Love is the fulfillment of the commandments Jesus had referred to in [15:10](#). Paul expressed that same principle to the Christians at Rome:

**Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:8)**

**What Paul wrote concerning the Thessalonians, "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another" ([1 Thess. 4:9](#)), is true of all Christians.**

**Love for fellow believers characterizes the redeemed, as John repeatedly emphasized in his first epistle:**

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (2:9-11)

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (3:10)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (3:14-15)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (4:7-8)

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (4:20)

**The daunting standard for believers' love for each other is set forth in Jesus' words just as I have loved you.**

***That does not mean, of course, that believers can love to the limitless extent or in the perfect manner that He does. But just as Jesus loved sacrificially, so also must they. "Walk in love," Paul wrote in***

*[Ephesians 5:2](#), "just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." The love believers have for each other is marked by a selfless devotion to meeting one another's needs; it is not mere sentiment, or superficial attachment. In fact, Christians' love for each other is the church's most powerful apologetic to the unbelieving world ([John 13:35](#)).*

*The Lord's death, at that point only a matter of hours away, was the supreme evidence of His love, as His statement Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends indicates. Jesus did not die for Himself, but so that others might live. (see [Romans 5:8](#))*

*In a marvelously concise statement—only fifteen words in the Greek text—Paul summarized Christ's substitutionary atonement for believers: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)). Peter reminded his readers that "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" ([1 Peter 3:18](#)). Echoing the Lord's words in this passage, John wrote, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" ([1 John 3:16](#)). Then the apostle expressed the practical implications of that truth: "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" ([vv. 17-18](#)).*

### **The Friends of Jesus Obey Him**

*You are My friends if you do what I command you.  
([15:14](#))*

*The essence of sin is rebellion against God.*

Samuel rebuked Saul for his failure to do what God had commanded him: "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" ([1 Sam. 15:22](#)). Samuel then equated rebellion with sin: "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry" ([v. 23](#)).

*A person cannot submit to God while at the same time openly rebelling against Him; the same life cannot be characterized both by lawlessness and obedience ([1 John 3:6; 5:18](#)). Thus, obedience and faith are closely linked throughout Scripture. Conversion takes place when those who "were slaves of sin" become "obedient from the heart" ([Rom. 6:17](#)).*

*Peter also defined unbelievers as "those who do not obey the gospel of God" ([1 Peter 4:17](#)). Paul declared that the goal of his apostolic ministry was "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles" ([Rom. 1:5](#); cf. [15:18; 16:26](#)). The heroes of faith listed in [Hebrews 11](#) demonstrated the reality of their faith by their obedience. So closely is obedience related to saving faith that [Hebrews 5:9](#) uses it as a synonym for faith: "Having been made perfect, [Jesus] became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." Peter wrote that believers were "chosen... to obey Jesus Christ" ([1 Peter 1:1-2](#)). [John 3:36](#) also equates believing with obeying, noting that "he who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

## **W. E. Vine points out another link between faith and obedience:**

Peithō [to obey] and pisteuō, "to trust," are closely related etymologically; the difference in meaning is that the former implies the obedience that is produced by the latter, cp. [Heb. 3:18,19](#), where the disobedience of the Israelites is said to be the evidence of their unbelief.... When a man obeys God he gives the only possible evidence that in his heart he believes God.... Peithō in N.T. suggests an actual and outward result of the inward persuasion and consequent faith. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words [Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1981], 3:124)

**Obedience is not the means of salvation, but it is the inevitable result (Eph. 2:8-10); it is the proof that a person has a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The branches that abide in Christ, the true vine, will inevitably bear fruit (see the exposition of [15:1-11](#) in the previous chapter of this volume); His sheep hear His voice and follow Him ([John 10:27](#)); true disciples obey His Word ([John 8:31](#)). Good works save no one, but a faith devoid of them is dead and cannot save ([James 2:14-26](#); cf. [Eph. 2:10](#)).**

### **The Friends of Jesus Know Divine Truth**

*No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. ([15:15](#))*

The term **slaves** did not have many of the negative connotations in Jewish culture that it does today. In fact, some of the most noble figures in the Old Testament were described as slaves (Heb. *ebed*) of God, including Moses ([Num. 12:7](#)), Caleb ([Num. 14:24](#)), Joshua ([Josh. 24:29](#)), Job ([Job 1:8](#)), David ([2 Sam. 7:5](#)), Isaiah ([Isa. 20:3](#)), and even the Messiah ([Isa. 42:1](#)).

In the New Testament Paul ([Rom. 1:1](#)), James ([James 1:1](#)), Peter ([2 Peter 1:1](#)), Jude ([Jude 1](#)), and John ([Rev. 1:1](#)) similarly called themselves slaves (*doulos*) of Jesus Christ. The term reflected their utter submission to and dependence on their heavenly Master. This word, *doulos*, and the related verb *douleuō*, always and only refer to slavery. *Doulos* is the corresponding word to *kurios* (lord). Jesus is Lord, believers are His slaves. *Doulos* is, however, usually translated "servant," or "bond-servant." But their nearly 150 uses in the New Testament are to be understood as references to slavery. A slave was bought, owned, subjected to, provided for, and protected by his master (*kurios*). He lived in total submission to the will of his master.

While it is true that the followers of Jesus are also designated as slaves, that is not sufficient to fully convey our relationship to the Lord. **Incredibly, we are also called His friends—a more exalted title even than "disciple." In the Old Testament only Abraham had the privilege of being named the friend of God** ([2 Chron. 20:7](#); [Isa. 41:8](#); [James 2:23](#)).

**A custom from biblical times sheds light on the great honor believers have in being the friends of Jesus Christ. William Barclay writes,**

**This phrase is lit up by a custom practised at the courts both of the Roman emperors and of kings in the middle east. At these courts, there was a very select group called *the friends of the king, or the friends of the emperor*. At all times, they had access to the king; they even had the right to come to his bedchamber at the beginning of the day. He talked to them before he talked to his generals, his rulers and his statesmen. The friends of the king were those who had the closest and the most intimate connection with him. (*The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, The New Daily Study Bible [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001], 207-8. Italics in original.)**

**It is that kind of intimate access that Jesus graciously grants to His friends. Because they are His friends, Jesus promised to share with believers all things that He had heard from the Father. They "will know the truth, and the truth will make [them] free" (John 8:32).**

*The friends of Jesus have insight into "the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:25-26). The term "mystery" in the New Testament refers to things hidden in the past, but now revealed by Jesus to the apostles, and through them to all believers. The New Testament reveals the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:11), the mystery of Israel's hardening (Rom. 11:25), the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19), the mystery of the rapture (1 Cor. 15:51), the mystery of God's will (Eph. 1:9), the mystery that Jews and Gentiles would be one body in Christ (Eph. 3:4-6), the mystery of the union of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32), the mystery of Christ's indwelling of believers (Col. 1:26-27), the mystery that the Messiah would be God incarnate (Col. 2:2), the mystery of lawlessness, which will be fully revealed in the person of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:7), the mystery of the faith (1 Tim. 3:9), and the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16). Their ability to understand the spiritual truths Jesus reveals to them sets His friends apart from the unredeemed, who have no such privileges:*

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:12-16)*

## Friends of Jesus Have Been Specially Chosen by Him

*You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*  
([15:16](#))

*In a reversal of the customary Jewish practice (normally would-be disciples approached a rabbi they wanted to follow), the disciples did not choose Jesus but He chose them. The knowledge that Jesus chose them (and by extension all believers) to salvation apart from any merit of their own (v. 19; [John 6:44,65](#); [Acts 13:48](#); [Rom.8:28-30](#); [Gal. 1:15](#); [Eph. 1:4](#); [2 Thess. 2:13](#); [2 Tim. 1:9](#); [2:10](#); [1 Peter 1:1-2](#)) eliminates any pretense of spiritual pride that Christians might otherwise feel (cf. [Rom. 3:27](#); [4:2](#); [1 Cor. 1:26-31](#); [Gal. 6:14](#); [Eph. 2:9](#)).*

*Not only did Jesus choose the disciples for salvation, He also appointed them for service. The word translated appointed is a form of the verb tithēmi, which has here the connotation of being set apart or ordained for special service (cf. its similar usage in [Acts 20:28](#); [1 Cor. 12:28](#); [1 Tim. 1:12](#); [2:7](#); [2 Tim. 1:11](#)).*

*Having chosen and trained the disciples, Jesus commanded them to go into the world, proclaim the good news about Him, and bear fruit. The Christian life is not a spectator sport; Jesus did not choose believers to stand idly by while the world continues on its way to hell. On the contrary, His explicit command is, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" ([Matt. 28:19-20](#); cf. [Luke 14:23](#)).*

When believers proclaim the gospel, those who respond savingly to it become fruit that will remain forever (cf. [4:36](#); [Luke 16:9](#)). That the Lord repeated the promise of [verse 7](#) (see the exposition of that verse in chapter 13 of this volume), whatever you ask of the Father in My name He will give to you, emphasizes the essential link between prayer and evangelism (cf. [Luke 10:2](#); [2 Thess. 3:1](#)).

The privileges that characterize the friends of Jesus Christ carry with them corresponding responsibilities.

It is their nature to love one another, yet the Bible commands them to "fervently love one another from the heart" ([1 Peter 1:22](#)). They know divine truth, yet they must study it diligently ([2 Tim. 2:15](#)). Jesus called His friends out of the world, so they must be careful not to love it ([1 John 2:15](#)). Those who have been granted the privilege of bearing fruit must submit to the Father's pruning, so they can bear even more fruit ([15:2](#)). The Lord's promise of answered prayer demands that believers pray effectively ([James 5:16](#)) and unceasingly ([1 Thess. 5:17](#)). In short, those who have been granted the inestimable privilege of being the friends of Jesus Christ must "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which [they] have been called" ([Eph. 4:1](#)).

**CRITICAL: Paraclete 1, 2, & "WE 3"**

**QT:** *"Jesus was supernaturally and eternally intentional about everything He did and said... Every WORD was measured-in & meant-for eternity. With that said, please note that the dead branches were never described in terms of their size... only their source, supply, & spiritual growth.*

I draw your attention to this truth in hopes of warning some... and waking up others. You see... I have seen the full spectrum of dead branches. I grew up (outside of Boston) under the shadow of arguably the largest dead branch in the world today - Catholicism.

I have also been in the company of countless other "ordinarily dead" branches - you know, all the people *"in church"* that are NOT *in-Christ* (that assume they're good with God because they (again), wrongly assume, that they are "basically a good person that is biblically informed – to some dangerous degree. Unfortunately, hell is going to be littered with "basically-good, biblically informed" dead branches.

Lastly, and perhaps most tragically of all, I have also seen an ever-growing population of "dead twigs" - our "next generation" is being led away & bundled for the furnace at an exponentially increasing rate. Friends, we as a country, a culture, a community, and a contemporary Church... **MUST** wake up & stand up to the "tragedy of twig burning!"

More and more twig-burning is being facilitated through our culture, computers, and with the apathetic silence, (and there by condoning acceptance) of professing Christian homes & churches.

I've seen it all... More importantly, Jesus walked amongst, it all and warned us from within. Friend, Jesus WANTS all such dead branches to walk with and worship Him - the One and only

life-giving Vine. Amen ! - JDP

**NOTE: list the 7. "I Am" designations AND their death-delivering, counterfeit counterparts !**

There is no greater pain or paradox than to be in the midst of mechanical malcontents,.. those "playing the part" but missing the HEART & passion of Christ. In our context, such are the people in church who are actively deceived (and/or) deceiving - they are the *decorated* "dead branches." The church's decorated dead are like corpses at their own open casket funeral... They wear a costume of cosmetics, thickly applied so as to mask the obvious - they are the dead amongst the living... While, (in a disturbing sort of way), the dead person/branch "looks" enough alike their living, breathing counterparts, (those whose beating hearts give evidence to their life), still, the spiritually empty are life-less. They are dead.

Even so, in pointing to & proving the dual (physical AND spiritual) natures of our human experience, there is (and we often see) what I call the "dead branch dance."

Jesus brings the dead to life... Judas, and those like him (the walking dead) bring a living hope to a dying hell...

Tragically, there are too many, neigh countless dance halls for the dead... These dancing, dead branches create an awful arboretum of death in disguise.

"ON is NOT the same as IN." - JDP

(this truth applies in both directions.. up AND down)

Friend, when you're not obeying... You're not abiding.