

John 15 Chapter Study

INTRO

I. THE SIGNS Chs. 1-11

II. THE END Chs. 12-21

E. The Last Supper Chs. 13-17

The Passover meal is now finished.

Judas has left to meet up with the Temple police.

Jesus has told them that his time left with them is rapidly coming to an end.

He's foretold Peter's coming denial.

And now as they prepare to leave that room where they'd shared their last meal together, Jesus has some important final words to say to them.

Those of you who have red letter Bibles will notice all of ch. 15 is red – this is *all* the words of Jesus.

11. Jesus, the True Vine 15:1-8

1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

Jesus uses a metaphor that had both practical & spiritual significance for them.

Being an agricultural economy & one in which grapes played a significant part, they were well acquainted with the practice of *tending vines*.

But on a deeper, spiritual level, the figure of Israel as a vine was one well rooted in the Jewish mindset. [Isa 5:1-7 Jer. 2:21 Eze. 15, 19:10 Hos. 10:1 Psa. 80:8]

So prominent was this idea that coins minted during the era just before Herod had a vine on them as a symbol of Israel, just as the USA is represented on many of our coins as an eagle.

In Jesus time, on the front of Herod's temple there in Jerusalem was a massive solid gold vine with several bunches of grapes hanging from it, as a symbol of the nation.

Many of the wealthy contributed to the temple by fashioning a golden grape or even bunch of grapes to be added to the vine.

But in several of the passages of the Tanach that referred to Israel as God's vine, the image wasn't all that healthy or positive.

Often times the word of the Lord to His vine was that it was *not* giving the fruit it *ought* to.

When Jesus said, “**I am the true vine,**” He was saying what God had always intended Israel to be, He was the *fulfillment* of.

God's purposes for the nation found their climax & fulfillment in Him.

When Jesus said His Father was the *vinedresser*, He meant the Father is the One who ensures the true vine brings forth the intended fruit. Here's how -

2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **3** You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

V. 2 has caused quite a stir among Bible students over the years.

Just what does Jesus mean when He says, “**Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away**”?

Those who say the Christian *cannot* lose their salvation say this word “take away” is the Greek word *airw* = Aye-roh; and means to “lift up.”

They say this refers to the vinedresser’s method of making sure unproductive branches begin producing by lifting them out of the shade & dirt & wrapping them round the trellis.

The problem with that is that while the word *airw* can indeed be translated as “lift up” the *connotation* of the word is always one in which the thing lifted up is *removed* & carried away.

It’s true that the vinedresser lifts the lower branches that are hanging low so that they don’t fall into the dirt, but that is not the picture here.

What is, is the fact that on a grape vine, there are 2 kinds of branches; those that produce fruit, & those that don’t.

These are *sucker branches*, growth that’s a natural part of the vine but saps the life & vitality of the plant.

The vinedresser is skilled at detecting these suckers, & snips them as soon as it’s evident they aren’t going to produce fruit.

The implications of what this means for the followers of Jesus will become clear as we read on.

Continuing in the symbolism of the vine & dresser, Jesus said that the branches which *do* bear fruit, the Father prunes, all so that they will produce even *more* fruit.

Then, in v. 3 Jesus said that the disciples were already “clean” by the Word He’d given them – it’s the same word as “prune” in v. 2.

You see, the process of *pruning* the vine was referred to as “cleaning.”

The dresser snipped off all that growth which would only hinder the fruitfulness of the branches.

His goal was to channel the life & energy of the vine into the branches and from the branches into fruit, not worthless growth that accomplished nothing significant.

Here’s the point Jesus is making in these first 3 verses . . .

He’s the focus of the work of God; He’s the One the nation of Israel was singled out all the way back in the time of Abraham to produce.

All that God intends mankind to be about is found in Christ; He is the focal point of redemptive history.

Now that Jesus has come, those who want to know God & be in fellowship with Him must do so *through* Him.

Those who are in that place of communion & genuinely a part of Christ will bear spiritual fruit; those who aren’t – won’t.

Those who are bearing fruit will experience the skillful hand of God at work in molding their lives to *maximize* their effectiveness for the Kingdom.

Those who *claim* to be a part of the vine, but who *consistently remain* fruitless – these will be removed.

Does this mean a Christian can lose his/her salvation?

Let me answer that this way.

When Jesus said they bear no fruit – He used a verb tense which means the consistent pattern of their lives is fruitlessness.

They never have, don't now, & never will bear fruit.

God knows their nature – He knows they never will bear fruit – that's why He removes them.

If God knows fruit's eventually coming – will He lop them off? No! Jesus is not dealing here with the subject of losing salvation.

He's dealing with the issue of those who are *fakers* from the start.

They make an appearance as believers, but they have *never* been born again.

This is in opposition to those who *are* born again, & who *do* produce fruit.

No matter how meager or small it might be, God will carefully work to shape them toward greater fruitfulness.

This is why the process of spiritual growth & maturity can be painful – because it means pruning.

There are places the flesh & ways self still work too great an influence on us.

These things need to be snipped, cut away, if we're to achieve maximum fruitfulness.

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

The key to being fruitful is to abide in Christ, in the same way that the branch finds its ability to produce fruit by simply staying attached to the vine.

This word “abide = meno” is a rich word that speaks of a vital & permanent connection.

There was a saying popular a while back – “Keep on keeping on.”

That is exactly the meaning of ‘meno’ – ‘abide’.

It speaks of a place of dwelling that is purposeful & settled.

Jesus is saying that as His people, our real aim ought not be to bear fruit so much as to abide in Him.

If we make it our aim to stay in intimate fellowship with Him, then the fruit will flow.

The farmer who's plowing furrows in his field, looks at a point on the other side of the field, not right down at the ground in front of the plow blade.

If he looks at the ground his path will stray and meander all over leaving a crooked furrow.

But if he fixes his eye on the horizon & moves toward it, he can look back when he's across the field to see a nice straight cut in the soil.

[Ex: of orange]

In the same way, we do not produce the fruit of the Spirit by striving to be more loving, more joyous, more peaceful, more longsuffering, more kind, more good, more faithful, more gentle, or more self-controlled.

These things flow as we do *one thing* – seek to be in close partnership with Jesus who IS THE LIFE.

When we abide in Him, then it's His life that flows from us in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and all the rest.

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

Here's a great spiritual diagnostic.

The man or woman who is abiding in Christ is bearing a lot of spiritual fruit.
The one who isn't → isn't.

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

Jesus is repeating what He'd said in v. 2.

Those who abide bear fruit. Those who don't, won't.

And if there's no fruit, there's no life, & God will remove them so that they don't hinder the purity & fruitfulness of the true vine.

Vine wood is too soft to be used for anything else, so when branches were cut off, they're set aside to dry, then burned.

The Church has always had fakers, frauds, & pretenders who've taken their seat among the family of God for a season.

The NT has several references to false brethren who eventually were unmasked.

But unmasked they inevitably are – just as Jesus says here – the Father will remove them.

We ought not be freaked out when fakers are exposed, when people who looked like the real deal turn out to be frauds.

Sure it's going to hurt when they're exposed & they walk away with an attitude of indifference or outright hatred.

But we ought not be surprised. They're *dead branches*.

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

This is a wonderful promise.

If we're abiding in Christ, and His truth is at home in us, then our hearts & minds will be shaped by His life and our desires will be His own.

Our prayers will be expressions of God's own will working dynamically through us.

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

The goal of the disciple is to be just like the rabbi.

Because Jesus would soon send the Holy Spirit back to them, & the Spirit would then mediate the very Life of Jesus *inside* them, their fellowship with Him would become even more close than it had ever been for the last 3 years!

Up till now, they had abided WITH Jesus – soon they would be able to abide IN Him.

His very life would take up residence inside them, providing a spiritual energy that would come out in the same fruitfulness He'd demonstrated throughout His ministry.

Just as Jesus had glorified God, they now would carry on in the same way.

The followers of Jesus are *called* "Christians" because they are *in fact*, the ones who continue to experience the life, fruit, & ministry of Christ in every

generation.

12. Abiding in Love 15:9-17

9 “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

The divine love experienced between the members of the trinity has been showered on us as the redeemed. Jesus invites us to *luxuriate* in that 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.

The way to remain in the place of enjoying the benefits of God’s love is by obeying Him.

This is an important insight – God’s commands are not heavy rules that are aimed at making life miserable.

They’re markers identifying the realm of His perfect will.

They define the way life was meant to work & how we can find the sweet spot of what we were created for.

Our neighbor’s dog is a really good dog. It’s learned that it’s not to leave the front yard.

Because they have a corner lot, the front yard is a lot bigger than the back & they let it out often.

It walks around the yard, sniffing, playing, having a good old time.

But it never leaves the yard. It doesn’t need a leash, or a chain, because it knows the boundaries and happily stays within them.

Because of that, it gets to go into the front yard all the time.

Gretchen, our dog, who just recently went to doggie paradise, was a nightmare when she got out.

She would look for any chance to dash out the door or gate & would then run around the block until we managed to snag her.

Because of that, we couldn’t let her out into the front yard and had to stay in the backyard, which wasn’t nearly as interesting as the front.

We tried to train Gretchen to respect the boundaries of the front yard, but she refused to learn, & so lost out on the privilege of greater freedom.

The truly free are not those who do whatever they want.

They are those whose *wants* are framed by God’s love.

11 “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

Joy is something many modern American Christians don’t understand.

They think joy & happiness are synonymous. They aren’t.

Happiness is determined by what *happens*.

If things are going well, I’m happy. If not, I’m sad.

Joy isn’t gained from our present surroundings or circumstances.

Joy is a deep-seated confidence & peace that comes from knowing the end is all good.

Joy doesn’t rise or fall with our mood or how we’re being treated.

It’s an inner settled knowledge that God loves us, that Jesus has overcome all that could ultimately harm us, and that when all is said and done, we will be safe in heaven.

As Jesus makes clear here, this kind of joy comes through what He's promised – it's a thing of faith.

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

In ch. 13:34-35, Jesus had given His followers a new commandment – that they love one another just as He had loved them.

He said this would be the *distinctive badge* of His disciple.

Since the goal of a disciple is to be just like the rabbi, & Jesus said others would be able to identify Christians by their love for one another, this means to be just like Jesus is to be filled with a practical, selfless love for one another.

13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

As Jesus had said in v. 12 that they were to pattern their love for one another on His love, now He points to just how far His love will go – to the cross, to the death of self so that another can be benefited.

It's important we understand that what Jesus is calling for here is *action*.

He's not saying – "Feel warm & fuzzy about others."

He's calling for deeds that communicate concern & care.

14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

This is a unique claim Jesus is making; this cannot be said by everyone.

I would never say to you – "You're only my friend if you do what I *command* you."

Because I'm far from perfect & a man in process of being conformed to the image of Christ, I need my friends to correct, rebuke, & refine me.

I don't need or want them only telling me what I *want* to hear.

God, is in an altogether different place. He's perfect. There's no correcting Him. So really, only God could make this claim, because He's the only one Who has both the authority & perfection to do so.

15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

The difference between a servant & a friend is understanding.

Servants are bound to do what they're told; the master has no sense of *obligation* to explain himself.

A friend is different in that there's a sense of partnership & understanding.

A person explains what he's doing to his friend.

Through the understanding that comes from that explanation there's a personal sense of ownership & participation.

Jesus says that the disciples aren't just servants who's sole task & identity is to mindlessly obey God.

God has taken them up into Himself. They are now God's partners.

Because of what Jesus has revealed to them, they've come to understand what God is doing and how He wants to use them to do it.

16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

The pattern was for a disciple to choose his rabbi.

Rabbis didn't choose their disciples; they simply gave them *permission* to follow.

Jesus had *reversed* this pattern, had gone to the disciples, & told them to follow Him.

Whereas normally when a disciple picked a rabbi to follow he was saying in essence, "I can be just like you," when *Jesus* called the disciples He was saying, "I *know* you can be just like Me."

Now that He's come to the end of their 3 years of training & was turning His mission over to them, He reminds them that it was He who had done the choosing, not they.

And the only way He would be ending their training is if they were ready.

That's why He says . . .

17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

If they do this one thing, they will effectively continue His mission.

But now we come to a turning point.

Up till this point His comments have focused on the relationship they will have with Him & one another.

That relationship will mark them as very different from the rest of the world.

And that difference will not be cherished by the lost.

13. Enduring the Hate 15:18-16:4

18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

By "if" Jesus is NOT saying the world *might* hate His followers; He's saying "when" they experience the world's hatred, they're to remember that it hated Him long before.

19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Jesus speaks *categorically* here:

The world loves its own kind but hates God & His kind.

The world does not, *cannot* love Christians.

The reason why is because the world lies under the control of Satan & he is resolutely *opposed* to God.

It's a losing proposition to try & earn the world's acceptance & love because everything the world stands for & values is contrary to God.

This is why James 4:4 says that the one who tries to be a friend of the world makes himself the enemy of God.

This verse has proven troubling for many thoughtful Christians.

They read it & ask, "Does the world hate me?"

They don't see a lot of outright persecution; they don't have people making

faces at them or slashing their tires because they have a bumper-sticker on their car.

So they begin to wonder what Jesus meant by this, or if maybe their witness is so hidden the world isn't challenged.

They begin to feel bad that they aren't more the object of the world's hatred. One of the things we have to take into account is just how big an influence the Judeo-Christian worldview has had upon our culture.

If its influence is strong, the world's hatred will be more civilized & less violent because the Gospel will have implanted those virtues in that culture.

But where the *influence* of the Judeo-Christian worldview loses its potency, the world's hatred will become more obvious.

That is precisely what we're seeing in our time.

Truth be told, if you were to go to Mecca today and live the expression of faith in Christ you currently do, chances are you'd be arrested & executed as an infidel.

20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

Because the world hates God, they will hate His followers who are indwelt by Him.

22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

Jesus is speaking here specifically of the sin of rejecting God, Whom He perfectly manifests.

Now that He's come, their rejection has sealed their fate.

23 He who hates Me hates My Father also.

This is a telling remark, for there are many today who say they love & believe in God but don't want to follow Christ.

This is absurd because Jesus IS God.

All a person says when they say, "I'm into God but not Jesus," is that the God they're into is a figment of their own imagination.

24 If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father.

Because, as He'd made clear time & again, the works He did were only the works His Father told Him to do.

25 But *this happened* that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'

This quote comes from a few passages – [Psa. 35:19 69:4 109:3-5]

26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

Jesus had already spoken of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Helper just like Him

who would come to assist them in carrying on His mission. Though the world will express its hatred toward them, just as it had toward Jesus, that opposition would not stop their witness because the Holy Spirit would prevail and overcome the world's resistance.

27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

The disciple had a unique role among the followers of Christ He's identifying here. Because they had been with Him from the outset, they would be the one's who would lay the foundation of the Church through their evangelistic and pastoral roles.

The NT is the fruit of this unique role in the Body of Christ.