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## ***John 15:1-8 -- Allegory of the Vine and the Branches***

### ***Notes:***

Vs. 1 - *I am the true vine* -- This is the seventh, and final, "I am" statement of this kind in the book (cf. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7,11; 11:25,26; 14:6). As they are leaving the upper room and walking to the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus introduces an allegorical word picture to illustrate a key spiritual principle for them to remember. *and My Father is the Vinedresser.* -- The vine is that which produces fruit for the vinedresser's use and pleasure. The vinedresser cares for the vine, doing what is necessary to maximize growth.

Vs. 2 - *Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit* -- The verb here is a participle in Greek, literally, "every branch not bearing fruit". The natural process of healthy life is to bear fruit. Any branch not evidencing that process would be defective. *He takes away* -- Non-fruitbearing branches are a detriment to the productive potential of the Vine, and are removed. *and every branch that bears fruit* -- Another participle, implying that such a branch evidences a healthy link to the Vine. *He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit* -- Pruning (literally, "he cleanses it") involves cutting off unnecessary or defective growth. By cutting it back, the branch becomes thicker, stronger, and able to conduct more energy toward the production of the actual fruit. It is able to grow and support larger clusters of healthy grapes. In a similar way, the Father will "cut back", limit, or remove areas of natural growth in our lives, so that He can channel our life energy to produce what He desires in and through us. Just as pruning is a drastic operation performed to a plant, we also might experience pain, loss, and feel "stripped" in a variety of ways in this "cleansing" process. Note that the vinedresser is looking for fruitfulness, and taking measures to increase the productive capacity of the vine. In like fashion, we are told in Eph. 2:10 that "we are His workmanship (craftsmanship), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." God has redeemed, designed, and fashioned us to produce something, to accomplish certain things which He desires. Our salvation is not a "snatching ...out of the fire" (Jude 23) as an end in itself. God wants us to be productive and full of fruit (e.g., Phil. 1:9-11).

Vs. 3 - *You are already clean* -- They are starting out as "clean". The word translated as "already" also means "now". The word "clean" had a strong background in Judaism referring to moral and spiritual purity in relation to acceptableness to God. The "unclean" would be that which is unacceptable or defiled. *because of the word which I have spoken to you* -- Their "cleanness" is based upon their acceptance of Jesus' teachings by faith.

Vs. 4 - *Abide in Me, and I in you* -- This word, "abide", is the key word of this entire section. It occurs ten times within seven verses (4-10). The Greek word, menō, means "dwell in, remain in, continue in, live in, stay in". This occurrence of the word is a point-in-time command to dwell in Jesus. The second part of the phrase, "and I in you" is beyond the disciples' direct control or responsibility, hence it would seem to be a consequence or a promised result of the first part. We must not attempt to apply this analogy to areas of theology it was never intended to illustrate, e.g., can someone lose their salvation. It is not Jesus' purpose to comment on that topic here. He spoke to that issue in 10:26-29. We must allow Jesus to define what He means by the word "abide" by observing the way it relates in the illustration. What is the main point? *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me* -- It is this relationship of dependency which Jesus is talking about when He uses the word "abide". Spiritually, Christ is our source of life, the initiator, supplier, and support that makes fruitfulness possible. The phrase, "of itself" is exactly the same words Jesus had used several times before in reference to His own modus operandi. In 5:19, for example, He said, "...the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing". Cf. 5:30; 7:17; 8:28. In essence, He is telling the disciples that they are to relate to Him as He had related to His Father. Another important observation: The fruits are to be the result of relationship, not an attempt to earn it.

Vs. 5 - *I am the vine, you are the branches* -- This is a significant relationship to meditate on. The branches are extensions of the vine's life. They are supported by the sustenance that comes from the vine. The vine can survive without them, but they will not be able to survive without the input from the vine. Branches are necessary to the vine in that the clusters of grapes form on the various branches, not on the main stalk of the vine itself. The

branches, then, become channels for the expression of the vitality of the vine's life. However, as each branch grows and becomes healthy, it too will contribute to the totality of the vine's energy supply, providing support for the growth of other branches. The entire plant continues to grow, though the ultimate link to life for any branch is the vine. *he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit* -- This is now the fourth level of fruit bearing described in these verses: There are those branches who bear no fruit, who are then removed. There are those that are bearing some fruit. These are chosen by the vinedresser to be pruned, in order that they might bear more fruit. Finally, the branch that abides in the vine, that is most consistently drawing life and growth-initiative from it, will bear much fruit. The obvious key is in this relationship of abiding, of consistently living in, continuing in, that life-link relationship where the branch draws on and works out the supply and design of the vine's life through its own growth and self-expression. *for apart from Me you can do nothing* -- The vine is essential to the health, success, and fruitfulness of the branch. Without the vine's input, the branches are powerless to produce fruit.

Vs. 6 - *If anyone does not abide in Me* -- The Greek is significant here: "If ever not anyone might abide in Me". The NASB translation of the phrase sounds more like if someone stops abiding in Christ, then the consequent negative results will follow. The Greek phrase is more open to the situation where the person in question might never enter into an abiding relationship at all. The way one reads this would have significant ramifications on the interpretation one would derive from the passage. *he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.* -- These five verbs describe the fate of a branch that would not abide in the vine. The first is the result of the vinedresser's work (vs. 2), while the second would be the natural result of being cut off from the source of life. The next two verbs indicate action done to the branch by some unidentified workers. It is very likely that Jesus was thinking of the work of the angels at the end of the age, which He referred to in another parable (cf. Matt. 13:24-30,36-43). Finally, the last verb is action done to the branch, lit., "it is burned", not "they are burned". Again, how we might understand the word "abide" will definitely color our perception of what Jesus meant in this passage.

Vss. 7,8 - *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you* -- The verbs in Greek are very precise, "if ever y'all might (at a point in time) abide in Me, and My spoken words/My personal directives (rhēmata) might (at a point in time) abide in y'all..." Obviously, Jesus is describing a hypothetical situation. The point-in-time aspect of the verbs indicate that whenever these two scenarios come to pass at the same time, even for a moment, then the consequent will be possible. The significance of the use of a form of rhēma for "words", instead of logos, is that rhēma tends to be a personal directive, a word spoken to a person for a particular circumstance. Jesus is probably not talking about knowing or obeying Bible verses; He is referring to living out what He speaks to us in a specific circumstance. This is another way to refer to that relationship of being led by Him, of hearing and responding to His direction, even as He had Himself been led by and responded to the Father. *ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you* -- Literally, "what (thing) if ever y'all might wish/desire, ask (it) (at a point in time), and it will come to be/happen to/for you". This is not a license to manipulate God, or to insist on our way, or a magical formula to get our prayers answered. It is a bit of practical guidance. Jesus is saying that when we are in that "abiding relationship", walking out His instructions in a particular matter, and some desire, wish, or want seems to rise up within us, then we ought to expect that new desire to be God's further instruction and ask according to that leading. Jesus encourages us to pray confidently whatever desire or want rises out of our hearts at such a time. The plural forms of these verbs are meant to refer to another sign, or cross-check, that we are praying according to His will. If we, as a group, experience the same want, wish, or desire, we are commanded to "ask what if ever y'all might desire". The verb is an imperative, "ask/request (at that point in time) what (thing) if ever y'all might desire". *By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.* -- Literally the Greek says, "In/by this (thing) My Father was glorified". Translators have taken some arguable liberties in their attempt to make sense of this statement. Unquestionably, the word "glorified" is a simple, past-completed action of the verb meaning to "glorify, magnify, make apparent or signalize with a manifestation of dignity or excellence". Could not these translational gyrations be skirted by simply seeing that the "by this" refers back to the methodology taught in the previous verse, instead of trying to make it fit with the future tense of the next clause? What Jesus is saying is, "In this (manner/method) My Father was glorified (in My ministry among you) in order that (purpose clause) y'all might bear much fruit and y'all might come to be/become (there is no basis in the Greek for the word "prove" -- it is a translator's interpretation) disciples/followers to Me."