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JOHN 15:1-17

Today, we see one of the most profound teachings in the New Testament. If we can get a grip on this teaching, I truly believe it will absolutely revolutionize our walk with the Lord Jesus.

At this point, these men may still not have firmly grasped the fact that Jesus would soon die. But, I believe after the crucifixion, they remembered what He had said...the Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance all that He had said, and they applied it to their lives and they lived their lives in light of it.

And I want to say to you that we should do that, too!

John 15:1-5...

There is much speculation among Bible scholars as to why the Lord Jesus began talking about vines. The last verse of **chapter 14** says that Jesus said, **“Arise, let us go from here.”**

And some scholars say that in going from the upper room that they might have passed by the Temple and they would have seen the great golden vines that decorated the gates of the Temple, and this would have prompted the Lord Jesus to speak about the vine.

Another theory is that as they walked from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives that they would have walked between the rows of neatly tended grape vines, and this would have prompted the Lord to speak about the vine.

Whatever the reason, the Lord Jesus took this opportunity to teach very deep truths about Christian living.

In his excellent book, **SECRETS OF THE VINE**, which he wrote on this chapter, Bruce Wilkinson calls this teaching “family secrets” because this teaching is meant only for the family of God.

I believe for us to understand this teaching, we must first understand the meaning of some of the terms the Lord Jesus uses.

When the Lord Jesus speaks of
The **Vine**, He is speaking of Himself...
The **Vinedresser** – God, the Father
The **Branches** – believers...you and me...

Now, the **Fruit** is a little more complex.

For instance in **Galatians 5** Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit...**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.**

In **Colossians 1:10**, Paul speaks of fruit as being **good works.**

In **Romans 6:22**, Paul speaks of fruit as being **holiness...sanctification.**

In **Romans 15:28**, Paul speaks of fruit as being **giving.**

In **Romans 1:13**, Paul speaks of fruit as being **soul-winning.**

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And the writer of *Hebrews* speaks of fruit as being *praise...Hebrews 13:15*.

So, the fruit the believer not one or the other of these things we just mentioned...it is all of the above!

It is a combination of all. It is living a life that is characterized by **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, good works, holiness, giving, soul-winning, and praise!**

Now, **don't tune me out or turn me off!** This sounds like a mighty tall order at best and it sounds like an impossibility at worst...but if the Lord Jesus has told us to bear fruit, He will enable us to do it. So, let's spend the next few minutes seeing if we can learn how!

See, if the Lord created us to bear fruit for His kingdom...why would we want to go through life with no fruit in our basket or with a little fruit in our basket when we could have a lot of fruit in our basket?

Verse 2...

"takes away" is translated from the Greek word **"airo"**. However, this Greek word has four translations.

- 1) to lift up or pick up
- 2) to lift up figuratively, as in lifting up one's eyes or voice
- 3) to lift up with the added thought of lifting up in order to carry away
- 4) to remove.

Now, let me say right here that there is a difference of opinion among Bible scholars as to the translation of this word. Many great men believe that this should be translated **"takes away"** instead of **"lifted up."**

They believe that the person referred to in the first part of **verse 2** is **not** a saved person. They believe that he is a person who has professed to be a Christian, but was never truly saved.

Many other great men believe that this word should not be translated **"takes away"** but should be translated **"to lift up or pick up."**

And it is from **this** position that we're going to be looking at the lesson. If you have another opinion on this passage of Scripture...please know that you're in great company. Bill and I looked at every commentary on our shelves and out of the 10 or so that we looked at the split was almost even...just a few more taking the view we're going to be looking at today than the other view.

Who's right? I believe the key is found in two words... **"in Me..."** I believe all the branches we will be looking at today represent saved people. I don't believe the Lord Jesus is teaching on salvation in this passage.

He is teaching on the fruitfulness of a believer's life...and what happens when fruit isn't found in a believer's life...and what happens when it is.

We need to remember the **context** of this teaching.

We need

to remember that He is teaching His disciples...all of whom He knows are saved people...all are "branches". Judas has already gone out from them. They are all **in Him!** They are

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all in the "Vine."

So, I believe the branch in the first part of **verse 2** is "**lifted up.**"

See, in those days and even today, if a branch is trailing along the ground, the vinedresser comes along and lifts that branch up and washes off the dirt and insects that have gotten on it and moves it from the ground to the arbor.

Grapes aren't like squash or pumpkins that develop quite well while lying on the ground.

They must hang free. Consequently any branch that trails on the ground is unproductive. So the wise gardener takes the trailing branch and lifts it up and attaches it to the arbor so that it can get the air and sun it needs to produce fruit.

Now, how does this apply to you and me? Well, sometimes we need to be **lifted up** in order to bear fruit for the Lord. Sometimes the Lord looks at us and sees us trailing in the dirt.

Sometimes He sees dirt in our lives and He knows we need to be lifted up and washed and drawn closer to Himself in order to be all that He wants us to be.

And many times this comes in the form of **discipline**.
He disciplines us in order to get our **priorities in order**.
He disciplines us in order to get **the sin out of our lives**.
He disciplines us in order to get us to **focus our attention on Him**.

And this is first secret of the vine...

This is what He does with a barren branch...but, what does He do with a branch that **is** bearing fruit?

Verse 2...

"every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit"

God's strategy for getting more harvest out of His branches is certainly not the one you and I would choose. As contradictory as it sounds, the Vine-dresser's secret for **more** is...**less**.

If we can grasp this truth...this **second secret of the Vine**, it will absolutely change forever the way we feel about the trials and tribulations the Lord allows into our lives.

The gardener who grows grapes often will go to his grapevines and he will prune even the branches that **are** bearing grapes in order for them to bear **more grapes**.

See, left to itself, a grape vine will by nature produce more **new growth** than it will produce **grapes**. And the result is that from a distance the grape vine looks lush and luxuriant...but up close the grapes are really few.

And to the Christian, rampant growth represents all those preoccupations and priorities in our lives that in themselves are not wrong, but will keep us from more significant ministry for the Lord. Without pruning, growing Christians will only be able to live up to a fraction of their potential.

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How many of you have ever grown tomatoes? What are you supposed to do with those little “suckers”...you know, those little sprouts that grow between the branch and the vine? You’re supposed to pinch them off. The same is true of growing roses.

Is there anything wrong with these little “suckers”? No! But, if left on the tomato plant or the rose plant, the tomatoes and the roses will be fewer in number and smaller in size.

And many times there are things in our lives that take away from the fruit the Lord knows we are capable of bearing for His kingdom. God knows what it will take for our lives to produce not good fruit, not even better fruit, but the very best fruit!

So, He prunes from our lives those things that aren’t His best for us. He also uses the Word to cleanse us.

Verse 3...

The more we’re in the Word of God and allow Jesus to speak to us from it, the more we’ll be aware of sin in our lives and the quicker we’ll confess and repent.

We’ve talked about this before...

The closer we walk with the Lord, the more we’re in His Word, the more time we spend with Him, the more “little” sins become evident...don’t they?

The Lord just gets pickier...and the things we used to do without the slightest bit of conviction...we just can’t do anymore!

How does this pruning take place?

- sometimes simply a gentle word from the Vinedresser... (“still, small voice...”)
- sometimes chastening (“whom the Lord loves He chastens”)
- sometimes affliction (“before I was afflicted I went astray”)

Whatever method He uses, it will be perfect for us! He knows exactly where and how to prune!

And our Heavenly Father is never nearer to us than when He is pruning us. Sometimes He cuts away the dead wood that might cause trouble; but often He cuts off the living tissue that is robbing us of spiritual strength.

I think a perfect example from Scripture is the Apostle Paul. Paul bore fruit for God. In fact, Paul bore **much** fruit for God. But, Paul was constantly being pruned by God. Paul endured hardship and he endured beatings and shipwrecks and imprisonments.

And these things were allowed in Paul’s life...not to kill him...not to make him unable to bear any fruit...but to enable him to bear more fruit and the best fruit!

Have you ever wondered what kind of an apostle Paul would have been if he had never ever had a trial?

All that Paul was...his **job, position, heritage, pride, religion**...all had been pruned away. And do you remember his final letter from prison?

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He wrote,

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” Phil. 3:7-8

And in all that pruning away...**the Apostle Paul was used mightily to bear fruit for the kingdom of Christ!!**

Well, in studying this lesson this week I came to the conclusion that Jesus wants more than a close walk for us...closer than close...we are to abide **in Him!**

Verses 4-5...

Apart from the Vine, the branches are really quite useless, aren't they?

By the way, have you noticed the progression here?

- no fruit **verse 1...**
- fruit **verse 1...**
- more fruit **verse 1...**
- much fruit **verse 5...**

and in a few minutes we'll see yet another step in this progression...

As we mature and grow in the Lord, fruit-bearing will become a **natural** or should I say a **supernatural** part of our lives...**because that fruit can never be produced apart from the Vine!**

The principle is so simple...

If we **do** abide in the Vine...if we **do** abide in Christ...we will bear much fruit.

If we do **not** abide in the Christ...we are thrown away and we dry up and are gathered up and burned.

This does not mean a believer loses his salvation.

This does not mean a believer is sent to hell because he is not abiding in Christ.

It simply means that either my life is bringing forth fruit...to the glory of the Father, or because of unconfessed sin and a heart that refuses to listen to the Holy Spirit...my life habitually brings forth no good fruit and I am in immense danger of being set aside as His witness.

And the fruit I do yield is the kind of fruit that will be burned up.

It is not gold, silver or precious stones, but wood, hay and stubble that Paul speaks of in **1 Corinthians 3**.

I believe the best example in Scripture of this is Lot.

Lot was out of fellowship with the Lord. He was not abiding in the Vine.

Lot ceased to bear fruit for God's glory.

Lot's dead works were burned up in Sodom, but he himself was saved!

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Jesus said we must abide in Him. Jesus said apart from Him we can do nothing!

Verses 7-8...

Here we see Jesus giving us the principle for prayer...

- we must abide in Him and His word must abide in us – then we will be praying according to God's will!

Before we leave the subject of fruit-bearing, let's summarize...

- 1) we must be in Christ...we must be Christians...
- 2) the Father must cleanse us...we must be clean before Him...
- 3) we must abide in Christ...our fellowship with the Lord must be so strong that His life can work in and through us to produce the fruit He desires...

Notice the first two conditions are God's grace alone! They are His divine actions! **He** places us in Jesus Christ. **He** purges or cleanses us.

But the third...the abiding in Christ...is a matter of Christian responsibility.

Abide: **"continue, remain, dwell, endure, be present..."**

This is not a matter of "holding on" to one's salvation. It is a matter of abiding!

It is a matter of **consciously submitting** to Christ.

It is a matter of **consistent obedience** to Christ.

It is a matter of **committed study** of God's Word and prayer.

It is a matter of **constant communion** with Christ.

Well, in the short time we have left, let's at least look briefly at the rest of our lesson...

Verses 8-15...

In these verses we see Jesus use several elements that should be evident in a believer's life...

We've already seen fruitfulness. Then, He mentions love. Then, He mentions obedience and joy.

I just want to read to you what Charles Spurgeon said about the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for you and me...the greater love that no other man has than this...that he lay down his life for his friends...

"That laying down of life in our Lord's case was specially a proof of love, for He died voluntarily; there was no necessity upon **Him**, as upon **us**, to die. Other men, if they died for us, would but pay the debt of nature a little before its time; but Jesus died who needed not to die, so far as He Himself was concerned.

Spurgeon goes on...

"He died also amid circumstances of pain, and shame, and desertion, which made that death peculiarly bitter. The death of the cross is to us the highest proof of our Savior's infinite love of us. He must die the death of a felon, between two thieves, utterly friendless, the object of general ridicule; and this He must do as bearing our sins in His own body.

All this makes us say, 'Behold how He loved us!' O beloved,

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can we doubt Christ's love, since He laid down His life...?"

Verse 16...

We said there was a progression of fruit-bearing. We've seen that we are to **bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit**. But, this verse also tells us that we are to bear **permanent** fruit.

The Lord Jesus wants our fruit to remain! The Lord Jesus wants our fruit to last...

"Only one life! 'T'will soon be past.

Only what's done for Christ will last."

Warren Wiersbe said a very interesting thing regarding the fruit a Christian produces. He said we must remember that the branches do not eat the fruit; others do. We aren't producing fruit to please ourselves but to serve others.

We should be the kind of people who "feed" others by our words and our works... Our fruit should be a source of nourishment to those around us.

Verses 17...

Remember, Jesus knows He will be leaving. He knows how difficult the days ahead will be for these men. He wants so much for them to love each other and to draw strength from that love.

This isn't the first time we've heard Jesus say this to His disciples, is it? In fact, Jesus said that it would be this very love that they were to have for one another that the world would know that they were His disciples!

I want to ask you...does the world see this in us? I mean, can folks who **aren't** Christians tell that we **are** because of the love we have for one another? Peter tells us in his epistle that we are to **fervently** love each other. And that word "fervently" means "to stretch"...and sometimes it's a "stretch" for us to love some folks...but we're to love them anyway!

I believe this is one of the ways we can bear fruit for the Kingdom of God. I believe this is one of the ways we can draw folks to Jesus. And I believe if we're truly abiding in the Vine, we will truly love those whom He loves even if we have to stretch to do it!