

## THE VINE AND BRANCH RELATIONSHIP

John 15:1-10

Key Verse: 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

In the last lecture we learned that we can receive the Holy Spirit when we love God and love one another. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we can overcome fear and [anxiety attacks](#). When we receive the Holy Spirit, we understand the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, and especially, his glorious coming again. Most importantly, we have the peace of God. The peace of God is different from worldly peace. When we have the peace of God, we have joy down in our hearts. When we have the Holy Spirit, we can have the assurance that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. When we have the Holy Spirit, we learn that Jesus came from God and went back to God, and that we also will go back to God's house. John chapter 15 is a most favorite passage; so, many people choose as their new year key verse John 15:1, which says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener," or 15:5, which says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Since these verses are so poetic and exquisite, we are not sure if people choose them for their beauty, or because of the deep meaning of the relationship between the vine and branches. It may be well to say that human beings yearn to have a deep love relationship with God. This passage mainly teaches us about the relationship between Jesus and his children. It also teaches us God's children's basic obligation, which is to bear good fruit.

First, I am the true vine (1). When we read the Bible, we find that Jesus so often used parables and ideas which were part of the Old Testament religious heritage. In the Old Testament, Israel is pictured as the vine and the vineyard of God. Isaiah 5:1-7 says, "I will sing for 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 in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and [my vineyard](#). What more could have been 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, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it. The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress." Jesus quoted this part of Isaiah in Mark 12:1-11. Ezekiel 19:10 also depicts the vine and branch relationship in poetic form. It says, "Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard planted by the water; it was fruitful and full of branches because of abundant water." Hosea 10:1 describes the beautiful vine and branch relationship with a good intention, while

all the other Old Testament stories about the vine and branch relationship are somewhat unhappy. The vine had actually become the symbol of the nation Israel, which has real and genuine meaning.

When Jesus says in verse 1, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener," he describes poetically, maybe more than poetically, the relationship between God and man. Jesus compares himself to the root and the tree. It may well mean that he is the Creator God, together with the Father God, who is the gardener. This verse reminds us of John 1:1-3, which says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Alex Haley wrote a book entitled "Roots." Many are searching for the root of mankind. But our Lord Jesus Christ is the true root and the vine which has many branches. We must firmly believe that Jesus is the vine and we are all his branches.

Second, we are the branches (2). Look at verse 2. "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." These days many godless people think that they are their own men. They speak as if they were their own gods. But that's the sheer ignorance of one who believes that he made himself and can live in this world forever with his own wisdom. Verse 2 says that all human beings are branches of the vine, who is God.

God said in Genesis 1:28a, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." God's blessing to all humankind is to bear much fruit. In this part, we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ wanted his disciples to bear fruits. He wanted them to bear much fruit--as apple trees bear several hundreds of apples through their branches. When a fruit tree bears much fruit, it looks beautiful and abundant. Likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ wanted his disciples to bear much fruit. If we don't bear fruit, we are like parents without children. In bearing fruit, there are several principles to follow.

Firstly, we must cut off useless branches. In a tree there are two kinds of branches. One kind is good, and the other is bad. It is very sad to imprison criminals in prison. It is also sad that we cut off bad branches mercilessly. Cutting off bad branches seems to be an act of no pity. But bad branches should be cut off, because bad branches can become worm holes. Soon, worms in the worm holes invade the good branches and damage the good branches and good fruit. Therefore, in order to protect a good fruit tree, we must mercilessly cut off the bad branches. It also applies to our education. When a child grows like a bad branch, we must help him become a good branch by doing all our best. To cut off the bad branches seems to be against secular human rights. But we must take the pains to cut off bad branches.

There is a tendency only to admire and spoil people who look good and nice. Finally they become proud. Let's read verse 2. "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." The good branches are comparable to good people. Jesus says that even the good branches should be pruned. Wow! It means that a good branch has many small twigs which will eventually grow up to be small branches. But in

order to help the good branch grow strong and fruitful in the future, we must prune its small twig branches mercilessly. This is applicable to all human beings. Smart and handsome people are usually brilliant and have many abilities and hobbies. One boy who looked like a good branch had been pressed by four girlfriends all at once. He should have pruned them one by one. But he only became helpless. Soon he became a bad branch and dropped out of school when he was a junior in high school and became a street bum. We are sorry to see a good branch corrupted by the influence of bad branches. We must pay attention to good branches who can be good or promising people, and prune their many hidden bad habits and vices. As we know well, a man's greatness can also be his great vice. Therefore, every branch that does bear good fruit we must prune. Pruning makes us feel like dying. But by not pruning, we must not allow people to become spoiled, useless and worthless to God. What a wise and painful truth to cut off the bad branches and even to prune the good branches that bear good fruit! But this is a universal truth.

Secondly, we must bear good fruit. To bear good fruit means to become a person good in the sight of God. In the past, education was regarded very highly. Education was not a means of learning skills in order to get a good job; education was to edify and discipline a person so that he might come to know the fear of God, how to honor his parents, how to honor others, and how to love his wife as himself. Ultimately, the purpose of education is to make each person useful to a society and to a nation. So in the past, people studied astronomy to know the mystery of the universe. They studied philosophy and rhetoric and literature so that they would be greatly edified and useful, like good fruits.

In this passage, bearing good fruit signifies the growth of one's inner man. There are many historical people in the world, but we cannot say that they are all good fruit. For example, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was not formally educated. But he had a musical talent and became a piano teacher to aristocratic women who had majored in piano. He also became a literature tutor to many aristocratic women who had majored in literature. His secret was that every day for several years he spent three hours memorizing parts of many classics. At last, his imitation was over. He became very creative through his imitation stage. As a result, he wrote many books. Among them was "The Social Contract," which deals with the human inequality that produces a chaotic society. Another was "Emile," which is translated in many languages as "Education." He wrote so well about how to take care of children that he became world-famous. But he was so egoistic and self-righteous and immoral. Finally he decided to marry a woman who was an idiot, who would obey him absolutely. Rousseau had three children by her. But he didn't educate them according to his own principles. Instead, he sent them all away to an orphanage. He did not put into practice what he wrote. He was not a good fruit in the sight of God.

On the other hand, there are many people who lived pure and pious lives and grew in their inner men and became good fruit in the sight of God. St. Ambrose (340-397) was the Bishop of Milan. He lived a simple life. Instead of being involved in politics, he shepherded the people of one small church. He loved God and he loved God's flock in his church so much that his influence spread widely. Once, St. Augustine

(354-430) attended his worship service by chance. When we read Augustine's "Confessions," we learn that he was highly intellectual and a wanderer. He had wanted to be a religious man, so he joined the Manichaeans, who were extremely ascetic. However, their teaching didn't touch his heart. So he had not imagined that he would be a saint, even in his dream world. But he heard St. Ambrose's message on Romans 13:13,14, which says, "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." St. Ambrose's message not only touched his heart, it pierced his soul. He was immediately converted. On the way back from the worship service, he met a prostitute whom he had known before. She called out, "Hey Gus, where are you going?" Then he threw away his umbrella and turned around and ran away from her like a 100-meter track runner. He lived no more for his own pleasure. From that time on, he lived for the glory of God. In his time, the Roman Empire and the political Catholic church were almost destroyed because of their corruption and lawlessness. People thought the church would be destroyed together with the Roman Empire. But St. Augustine defended the church of Christ by writing "The City of God." The main content of this book is that worldly kingdoms rise and wane but the church of Christ prevails forever, because God is the Ruler of his chosen children. We can say that Augustine is a good fruit in the sight of God.

Third, remain in me (3-10). Look at verses 3-4. "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." In this part, the word "remain" is repeated eleven times (4[4],5,6,7[2],9,10[2]). We can understand the meaning of this word better if we read several Bible verses. Psalm 1:2-3 says, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." In these verses, "meditates day and night" has a deep meaning. Consciously and subconsciously human beings meditate on many things. But if we are going to remain in Jesus, we must meditate on even one word of God day and night, understand its deep meaning, and rejoice in it. Psalm 119:10,11 says, "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Those who are going to remain in Jesus must hide the word of God in their souls. Psalm 119:20 says, "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times." We like reading newspapers. But we should not read the Bible the way we read newspapers. We must read the Bible until our souls are consumed with longing for the law of God at all times. This is the meaning of remaining in Jesus. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." In this verse there is the phrase, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you." We must examine what is dwelling in our hearts. There are many good things, such as a Big Mac, a TV screen, and sports games, but above all, the word of our Lord Jesus Christ must dwell in our hearts. This is the meaning of remaining in him.

There is a strong impression that many go to church, but not many are remaining in Jesus. However, that's not true. There are many who are remaining in Jesus. There was a beautiful girl whose character was hyperactive. So she ran the 100-meter dash so well. She studied well with her quick mind. But her hyperactive character gradually led her to be restless. She almost became a wrestling champion. Then she studied the Bible with a Chinese Bible teacher. Finally she received John 12:24, which says, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." After she began to remain in Jesus, she became even more beautiful. She could have married and stopped studying. But in order to remain on the campus and be a shepherdess, she studied biology in graduate school. After that, she finished a Ph.D. in physiology and biophysics. She was accepted to a renowned university with a professor's position. But she refused it in order to steward Chicago UBF. In the past, she never cooked. But now she cooks for her husband every day and even packs his lunch without missing a single day. When she remained in Jesus, she was changed from a wrestler to a Ph.D. shepherdess and a mother of prayer. There was a boy who lived as a playboy, not an ordinary playboy but a high-levelled playboy. So he dropped out of graduate school and got a job in a girls' high school. His father committed suicide after much wandering. He could have been like his father. But he received Romans 8:1. It says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...." His life was completely changed by the grace of our Lord's unconditional forgiveness. He loved the word of God. He meditated on the word of God. He was happy to feed many sheep. When he did so, one fellowship in our church grew bigger and bigger. After studying the Bible, he resumed graduate school and finished a Ph.D. in physics. Now he has become a professor in physics. The best way to bear good fruit is to remain in Jesus. Jesus said in verse 5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." What Jesus said is indeed true. There are many seeds and flowers and many trees and many animals and many people. People say, "Is the pumpkin flower a flower, too?" If you remain in a pumpkin, you will become a funny pumpkin flower, and next, a pumpkin pie. Apart from Jesus, we all become useless and worthless before God. We must remain in Jesus and bear much good fruit. It is very important to remember that Jesus wants us to remain in him and bear much fruit: No fruit, no human being.

When we remain in Jesus, we become his disciples. An ambitious young man was accepted to the University of Chicago, and next, to Purdue University, which ranked number one in analytical chemistry. He got a Ph.D. in analytical chemistry. Then he wanted to be a college professor. But there was no position for him. So he entered a company with much pay. He wondered if he was going to be a company man all his lifetime. How pitiful it is to be a member of a company all his lifetime, and live under bosses! So he decided to remain in Jesus. After his decision, he began to feed college students with the word of God. Thus he has become Jesus' disciple by virtue of his wife. To become a disciple of Jesus seems to be nameless and hopeless. But to become a disciple of Jesus is the most glorious thing. There is a woman who became the U.S. Secretary of State. She was a Jewish girl abandoned in Czechoslovakia. Catholic parents raised her. She became the U.S.

ambassador to the U.N., and next, the Secretary of State. In other words, she is a disciple of a man who is the head of the U.S. government. She seems to be somebody. But in history she will be like a lightning bug on a rainy night.

These days we pray for Mongolia, because there is a work of God there. On average, 70 members come to the Sunday worship service. So we pray for Aquila and Josephine Shin that God may protect them and give them the word of God. Now Mongolia has become a hermit country. But in light of history, we find that Genghis Khan once conquered the world of his time. He ruled Mongolia, Great China, Khorezm, Russia, and Iran for nearly 400 years. In other words, he ruled from the Caspian Sea to the Sea of Japan and founded the largest land empire in history. Suppose you were one of the generals under Khan's dictatorship. You might have thought, "I am somebody. You know, I am a general under Emperor Genghis Khan." Khan was such a famous emperor in history. But we find that no one has named their son after him, "Emperor Genghis Khan," because his image is that of a ferocious bull dog.

First and last of all, in order to become good disciples of Jesus we must learn how to pray. Verse 7 says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." There are many ambitious servants of God. But they never revive their ministries, because they only think about this and that all day long. The next day, they also think about this and that with their smart minds, thinking that they are very smart and that they can do something great. But God's work doesn't grow through such people. We can't do God's work with our own strength. We must learn how to pray. We must have a clear and definite prayer topic. Then God will give us much fruit and qualify us as his beloved disciples.

In order to become good disciples of Jesus, we also must learn how to obey God's command. Read verses 9-10. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." These days, people are very rebellious instead of being obedient. If anyone doesn't want to obey when he has to obey something, he says, "Well, let me think about it." He thinks that if he obeys, he is not a person in this modern world. He thinks that rebelliousness is the decent way of life. The word "obedience" seems to be a taboo these days. But those who do not know how to obey are not normal human beings. In order to learn how to obey, we must deny our sinful nature and learn how to listen to the instruction of God. Obedient people are children of God and bear much fruit. Disobedient people are children of the devil, and their daily lives are tragedy itself. Have you ever heard of the devil smiling even once? Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Even though he is the Son of God, he obeyed God absolutely. Hebrews 5:8,9 says, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...." Without obedience, we cannot be a good disciple of Jesus. Let us obey Jesus' command, "Love one another," and be good disciples of Jesus so that God may establish America as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Today we learned that Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. We

also learned that God wants us to bear much fruit. We are born to bear much fruit; otherwise, there is no meaning for any person. May God bless you to believe that God is the vine and we are the branches, and that we must bear much fruit, remaining in him.