

REMAIN IN JESUS

John 15:1-27

Key Verse: 15:5

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

In John’s gospel, Jesus makes incredible claims about his identity. There are at least 7 **“I am”** statements. Jesus says, **“I am the bread of life (6:35) ...I am the light of the world (8:12) ...I am the gate (10:9) ...I am the good shepherd (10:11) ...I am the resurrection and the life (11:25) ...I am the way, the truth and the life...”** and here in 15:5, **“I am the vine...”**

John chapter 15 is part of Jesus’ last conversation with his disciples before his arrest, trial, suffering and death. Jesus appeals to them to remain in him, to remain in his word, and to remain in his love. Jesus reminds them again of his command to **“love one another.”** Jesus foretells that they will be hated and persecuted by the world. Finally, in this chapter, Jesus promises again to send them the Holy Spirit. Let’s listen to Jesus and take to heart his serious plea to remain in him.

First, remain in Jesus’ word (1-8). In chapter 13, Jesus had his last supper with his disciples in an upper room in a home in Jerusalem. There he washed his disciples’ feet. He also gave them a new command to **“love one another”** as he had loved them. Jesus also predicted Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s three denials. In chapter 14, Jesus declared that he is the way to the Father’s house. He also said that those who love him would obey him, and Jesus would send them the Holy Spirit to teach them and to remind them of his words. Chapter 14 ends with the words, **“Come now; let us leave.”** This indicates movement out of the room. Jesus then shifted his metaphor to gardening.

Look at 15:1-2. **“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 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.”** Israel knew that they were the vineyard of the Lord. Isaiah 5:7 says, **“The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”** Though Israel did not fulfill God’s purpose, Jesus did. Jesus bore the good fruit of perfect obedience to and love for God.

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God, as the gardener, does two things to make the vine fruitful. One thing the gardener does is he cuts off fruitless branches. Here, fruitless branches give the appearance that they are in Jesus. The problem is they don't have a life commitment to and dependence on Jesus. They appear to be following Jesus, but they are in Christianity only for the benefits. They don't intend to lose anything. They are expecting only health and prosperity by following Jesus. They are like Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus when the going got tough. They were like the Jews who hated Jesus even though they went through the motions of being God's people. They honored God with their lips or their rituals, but their hearts were far from God. I hope it is not so, but perhaps there is someone in this room like this: you appear to be a follower of Christ, but you are not really. Please ask yourself: Why am I here? Is it to grow in love for and obedience to Jesus, or for some other reason?

To remain in Jesus, you first have to be in him. We are born in Adam, in sin, in self-seeking, in the love of the world. In Adam, our aim is to get ahead in the world. This past week someone was given \$60 to find a parking space near Wrigley Field. He found a space for free. Wow! You know what he did with the \$60? He gave it back. He didn't give it back, because all his bills were paid and he needed no money. He gave it back, because it was the right thing to do. You know what happened? He was given the \$60 to keep. He showed that his hope is not in money.

Have you given your life and heart to Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If you can sincerely say that you have, then you are in Jesus. If you have not done so, then you are still in Adam, and I urge you to repent and trust in Jesus, even now. You might not get another chance. Do not harden your heart. Today is the day of salvation.

The other thing the gardener does is he prunes or trims or cleans fruitful branches to be even more fruitful. Look at verses 3-4. **“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also 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.”** If you have received Jesus and believed in his name, then you are a child of God. You have been forgiven of your sins and are justified before God. Romans 5:1 says, **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”**

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Though Christians have been cleansed and justified, we are not yet sinless. We continue to sin and therefore we continually need his cleansing each day. 1 John 1:9 says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** The word of God continues to correct, rebuke, teach and encourage us and to train us in righteousness (2Ti 3:16; 4:2). God’s word of truth continues to sanctify our lives (Jn 17:17).

The key to bearing good fruit is simple: remain in Jesus. The word **“remain”** means to stay with, cling to, and hold on to Jesus. Christian singer Chris Tomlin has a song: “Where you go, I’ll go; Where you stay, I’ll stay; When you move, I’ll move; I will follow...” God gave his people Israel training to follow his Presence, represented by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Numbers 9:21 says, **“Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out.”** God’s people were ready-to-go people.

Christians have the presence of God with them and in them through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Jesus’ words. The Holy Spirit guides us, leads us and moves us to glorify Jesus in our lives. But we can easily ignore or grieve the Holy Spirit (Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30), by our stubbornness or pride or fear. This is why we need daily pruning or cleansing to remain in Jesus and bear good fruit.

Now look at verses 5-8: **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”**

Do you ever feel unfruitful or fruitless? Verse 5 contains a promise as much as a reality: if you remain in Jesus, you will bear much fruit. Our effort is not to bear fruit. Our effort and task must be to remain in Jesus, whatever that means. Verse 7 gives a clue. Jesus says, **“If...my words remain in you...”** Jesus said similarly in John 8:31, **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”** Fruitful disciples of Jesus cling to Jesus’ words more than their own ideas or plans. When we remain in Jesus’ words, our prayers are effective and

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powerful, not to get what we want, but to pray in accordance with what he wants. Through fruitful disciples of Jesus, God is glorified.

Second, remain in Jesus' love (9-17). What is the fruit of Jesus' disciples by which God is glorified and by which they show themselves to be his disciples? It could be many things. But in the flow of John's gospel it is one thing for sure: it is love. In John 13:34-35 Jesus already had said to his disciples: **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** The identifying mark of a disciple of Jesus is love, not only love for Jesus, but love for others, especially for other followers of Jesus. Love comes from God (1Jn 4:7). Love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

Jesus says in 15:9, **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."** How did Jesus love his disciples in a way that the Father loved him? Jesus loved them by sharing his love and his glory with them and by giving them a glorious mission.

How can we remain in Jesus' love? Jesus says in verse 10: **"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."** Jesus had already said in chapter 14 that the proof of love for him is to obey him (14:15,21,23). And what is his command? Jesus commanded his disciples to remain in him and to remain in his love. Jesus commanded them to love. Jesus repeats this command in verse 12: **"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you,"** and again in verse 17, **"This is my command: Love each other."**

Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. To love is not easy or natural, because we are inherently self-centered from birth. The Apostle Paul describes love most excellently: **"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."** (1Cor 13) This is God's love. This definition of love always convicts me of my proud, rude, boastful and self-seeking mind and heart and how I have recently fallen short of love. I don't have this kind of love with my own effort or feeling. I need his mercy and grace to love like this. Only by remaining in Jesus can anyone love like this.

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Jesus both taught and showed the greatest example of love. Look at verse 13: **“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”** To love is to sacrifice oneself or to suffer on behalf of another, for their blessing, benefit and ultimate happiness. Jesus gave his life for us, dying on the cross for us, as the ultimate expression of his love for us. This is the spirit of love that followers of Jesus ought to have. 1 John 3:16 says, **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”**

Jesus gives his joy—full and complete joy—to his obedient followers (12). His obedient followers are not only Jesus’ servants; they are Jesus’ friends (14-15). Jesus’ friends are privy to secrets and inside information of the Father’s will. Jesus’ friends have a love-trust relationship with him. What a Friend we have in Jesus, the most loving and trustworthy Friend anyone could ever have!

In verse 16 Jesus speaks of his sovereign choosing of his followers: **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”** Sometimes we think we chose Jesus. In actuality, he chose us to be his followers. The fact that one believes in Jesus is nothing to boast about. It is Jesus’ grace and love given to that person who believes in Jesus. Jesus sends us on our life way to bear lasting fruit, the fruit of love.

Third, remaining in Jesus brings persecution (18-25). With all the blessings that Jesus has promised to his followers like love, joy and good fruit, who wouldn’t want to sign up to be one of his disciples? To be sure, the blessings of following Jesus surpass anything the world can give. But following Jesus is not without difficulty, hardship or pain.

In verses 18-25, Jesus promises hatred and persecution from the world for those who love and follow him. Why is it so? It is because the closer we are to Jesus, the more similar the world’s relationship to us will be as it was to Jesus. The world hated Jesus because he did not belong to the world. Jesus did not think or live like the world. The world hates to be rebuked or challenged, even if their ways are evil and sinful. A holy life is a threat and a condemnation to an ungodly life.

If no unbelievers feel threatened by our Christian life, if no unbelievers hate us, we need to consider whether we are trying to please Christ or people (Gal 1:10). Christians must not get buddy-buddy with the world (Jas 4:4). We are in the world but not of it (Jn 17:16). Christians are hated because they have been chosen

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by God and they belong to Jesus, not to the world. We are in Jesus. We are born of God by his grace and love.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit helps those who remain in Jesus (26-27). Now read verse 26: **“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.”** The Advocate is the Holy Spirit. He is our Counselor, Comforter and Helper. This is the third time Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in the upper room dialogue. He promised in 14:16-17, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”** Again, Jesus promised in 14:26, **“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”**

The Holy Spirit is Jesus’ eternal presence with and in those who love and obey him (Mt 28:20; Ac 5:32). The Holy Spirit teaches us all things and reminds us of Jesus’ words. The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus. The Holy Spirit fills us with love, joy and peace (Gal 5:22-23), far beyond what the world can give. The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus. Jesus’ disciples must also testify. See verse 27: **“And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”**

Jesus exhorts us to remain in him, to remain in his word, to remain in his love. He commands us to love one another, especially those who belong to the family of believers. When we love fellow Christians, the family of God is strengthened, the world takes notice and God is glorified. Following Jesus will cause the world to hate us. But Jesus promises us his presence in the Holy Spirit.