

In the allegory or extended metaphor in verses 1-17:

Who is the vine? Jesus

Who is the gardener? The Father God

What is the gardener's job? To cut off and prune branches

Who are the branches? Us, believers, disciples, followers

Application: This directly applies to us! We are the branches. As branches, our job is to bear fruit (verses 2, 8, 16). People don't grow grape vines to look at the pretty leaves.

Jesus claims to be the true vine. The vine is a familiar Old Testament symbol for what? Israel is portrayed as God's vineyard but it is often used in a negative sense—a symbol of Israel's degeneration, a withered, unfruitful state. So Israel is a vine planted by God to be fruitful but it is not very fruitful. And here, by contrast, is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the true vine—what the vine was designed to be/look like. All other vines are imperfect, unfruitful, mere shadows of the true vine.

What does it mean that the gardener cuts off very branch that bears no fruit? Every person who claims or professes to be a disciple of Jesus (a branch) is not necessarily a true follower. A good example is Judas. He looked and acted like a follower, but was not. He appeared to be a branch, but was not bearing any fruit. He was a counterfeit follower who was cut off.

Application: What might the pruning process look like in our lives? God has consistently used a disciplining process to make His people more spiritually productive, growing us into His image. Getting rid of sinful habits, reordering our priorities, changing our values, and purifying our character and conduct is often accomplished through trials. (See James 1:2-4.) No fruit-bearing branch is exempt from this important (though uncomfortable) process. The Father's purpose is loving, but the process may be painful. He is getting rid of everything that is spiritually detrimental to us.

What is the ultimate objective of the pruning process? To transform us into the image of Christ. The process is called sanctification. "And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Application: Are you willing to share an experience when you were pruned by the Father?

What is the one word that is used 11 times in this passage? Remain. In the Greek it is *meno*—to remain or abide. We are told that we are to remain in the vine. This refers to an intimate and constant relationship.

How do we remain in the vine? By living in obedience to the revealed will and Word of God, making a deliberate effort to maintain a close personal relationship with the true vine, and cultivating an intimate relationship with God. Remaining in Christ refers to conscious decisions or choices to live the Christian life. Abiding in Christ is trusting our Lord and obeying His Word. There are no special techniques or formulas. It is as simple as our belief and behavior. It is the only way to fruitfulness.

Application: Look back on your week. Did you live in Jesus this week? How did you do with trusting and obeying? Who did you choose to spend time with this week? Which people did you build up? What did you do for entertainment? Where did you go? Did you relax in the presence of Christ? Did you spend much time in the Bible?

The purpose of the branch is to bear fruit. How do you define fruit? Whatever results from walking with Christ—including Christian character, fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), good works, obedience to the commands of God. Verses 26 & 27 direct us to testify about Jesus—just like the Holy Spirit does.

Note: The key to bearing fruit is to remember that Jesus is the vine, we are just the branches. If we stick to the vine, then we will naturally bear fruit. It is not a forced thing. We are just a conduit linking the vine to the fruit. We are not the fruit. We are the branches. Jesus brings the fruit out of our lives as we abide in Him. Our greater purpose is to stay linked with the vine. Fruit happens!

Note: A vine needs to be cultivated at least three years before being allowed to produce fruit at all. It must be trimmed and allowed to grow, then be trimmed and allowed to grow again, and so on for a considerable length of time. Only after this does it become useful for bearing fruit. Similarly there are times in our lives when we seem to go on for considerable periods, undergoing rather radical treatment at the hands of the Father and seeing little fruit come from it. In such times we doubt if there will ever be fruit. But that is only because we cannot see as God sees. We do not have His perspective. Do not get discouraged if that has happened to you. Instead,

remember that Jesus promises fruit in due time if we truly remain in Him in a close way. We can give our witness, live the Christian life, and in a sense, not be concerned about the outcome; for, ultimately, God is the One responsible for the vineyard.

What about the branches that are thrown away and burned up? The branches that are taken away were not properly abiding in the vine. If they had been, they would have produced fruit. (i.e. Judas)

What is the purpose of fruit bearing? The purpose is to bring glory to God. One way we do this is by showing ourselves to be His disciples. If people look at our lives and praise *us* for the glorious fruit, something is wrong.

What is the secret to discovering joy? One result of our obedience to our Lord's command is joy. The amount of joy in our lives is directly proportional to our obedience level. If you're not joyful, ask yourself how you are doing in the obedience area.

Jesus commands us to love in a particular way in verse 12. What is it? Love one another *as I have loved you*.

What is the love of Jesus like? Unconditional, a choice, not based on externals, never-ending, unselfish, immeasurable, unfathomable.

How do you get to be Jesus' friend? We are to show our friendship to Him by simple obedience. We see that our obedience must be active, for Jesus said, "You are my friends if you *do*..."

What is the basis for His choosing us? His good pleasure. His grace. His love. In the Jewish culture it was common for disciples to choose their rabbis. Jesus upsets that apple cart. In this case the rabbi is choosing His own disciples.

Verses 18-27

Who/what is "the world" that hated Jesus? The mass of unbelieving humanity.

Note: In verse 18 the Greek word for hate is *miseo* and it means malicious and unjustifiable feelings toward others. There is no legitimate reason for anyone to hate Jesus.

So why does the world hate Jesus? Jesus testifies that its deeds are evil and exposes their sin. People reject Jesus because they do not know God who sent Him (verse 21). They are ignorant of Him because they are spiritually blind.

Application: As a Christian, do you feel like the world hates you?

Why can we expect the world to hate us? We are Jesus' followers and as we live our lives in front of them, we expose their sin. We are becoming more like Him and less like them. We have other loyalties and goals. We are different in a convicting way.

There is a reason Jesus gives for the world's hatred of His disciples, and that is because He has "chosen" them out of the world. Why would this breed hatred? The doctrine of election stirs up hatred in the hearts of the world. In the Old Testament God chose the Israelites to be His people, but He didn't choose the Canaanites. It's very difficult to understand.

Verse 22 Why are the sinners guilty of sin? Jesus' coming has removed all excuses for sin. They cannot plead ignorance. "If I had not come.... If I had not done...." The words and deeds of Jesus reveal who He is, and that He came from the Father.

Caution: Hatred or persecution of any kind from others can have the effect of making one hard. And out of that hardness there can arise a desire to strike back in fierce retaliation. There is no place for retaliation as Christians! This is not Christ's way. Remember that "they hated [Jesus] without reason" (verse 25). Let hatred be provoked only by your fellowship with Jesus, and not by you personally.

MEMORIZE: John 15:5