

[28] **Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. [29] And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. [30] Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. [31] But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.**

Jesus has just finished his discourse at the Passover supper. He has shared with them the plan of the Father. They were incredulous still grasping onto the hope of their present plans - of a populous Messiah who would rescue their nation from Roman rule. There is a poignancy in this comment by Jesus. His supposed expectation would been

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that they would have received the news with gladness albeit sorrow that Jesus had to suffer and die for their sins and those of the world. They should have marveled at the promise of His resurrection. But they did not want to believe it. **“...If ye loved me, ye would rejoice...”** is second class conditional

(negative conj *ei* + aorist passive of *exharetē* “rejoice” along with the particle *an*) **“If, and it’s not true, you loved me.”** This is a gentle rebuke, given the context. It’s obvious that Jesus loves them and there is a degree of love in return from the disciples but as in the “feed my sheep” passage, there is room for improvement - and there will be. The proof of His love (and for that matter their somewhat diluted love in return) is the next chapter where He takes the time to explain His relationship with them and theirs with Him. The illustration of the Vine. When was this discourse given? John is not a linear thinker as are we. They could have asked one final question and they all sat down and listened to this discourse or this could have happened along the way when this discourse happened is important only to us Occidental, linear thinkers.¹

Their Relationship with Christ: A Life of Union and Communion (Towns).

I would like to organize this section in the following way:

- The Vine and Husbandman. - 15:1.
- Care of the Vineyard - 15:2, 3.
- The Fruit of the Vineyard - 15:4 - 8.
- The Fellowship of the Vineyard - 15:9 - 17.

The Vine and the Husbandman.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. John 15:1.

“I am...” We have discussed this statement of absolute, exclusive reality before.²

¹ Read Towns [The Gospel of JOHN BELIEVE AND LIVE](#), pg. 146.

² See my previous lesson, [The Gospel of John Review](#).

This statement is just one more building block in John's polemic argument against those who would detract from the Person of Christ. "...the true..." This is given further weight with his assertion that he is the *true* (gk = *alethin*) vine. In the classical Greek *alethin* was an adjective that meant "pure, genuine or real."³ The LXX used this word to translate the attribute of God, closely aligned with His patience and mercy - *abundant in goodness and truth*, Exod 34:6. By the way, there is a similar adjective, *alethes*, that means not to lie as in John 3:33. Our adjective in John 15 means the genuine article - a small distinction perhaps but I think necessary to understand this passage. The point of all this minutia is that Jesus is the only, the genuine and by implication the truly nourishing Vine.

Psalm 80:7 Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. [8] Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. [9] Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

"...Vine." The Psalmist used the vine as a figure of Israel. Note the title "God of hosts - a reference to the protective care of God - in the case of this Psalm from other nations. Note also the transplanting and care that was given to the vine, Israel. What a wonderful illustration of Jesus' relationship with us. No doubt this figure was in the minds of the disciples while they were mulling over in their minds the awful events that were about to transpire and the comfort that this illustration brought to them. There may be an argument for having this discourse while they are walking along the vineyards that were so plentiful in Judah then and now. Wine was an important drink of the day. Pure water was not necessarily in abundance in the world of the time. Wine was safe to drink. Wine was also associated with fellowship at dinners - just a perfect example of His fellowship with His friends - safe to drink and wonderful fellowship. This illustration brings to mind rich thoughts of the process of the vine itself and the complicated process of caring for the garden of the vine.

"...my Father is the husbandman." Important in this whole process was the Husbandman - the Vine-dresser (literally in the original, Gardener). As in the rich illustration in our Psalm passage - great care was given to the vine - protective care and pruning care. Protective care - from vandals, from animals and insects - whatever would invade the Vineyard and wreak havoc with it. Pruning care - we will get into some detail in a moment about this, but the overall thought we should keep in mind is that the Husbandman has the well-being of the Vineyard in mind when He does the pruning. We should not get lost in a literal, disconnected train of thought when we arrive at a couple of difficult passages in this section - we should keep in mind that Jesus is talking to His friends - those who are believers. He is not threatening them with punishment in hell if they fail

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³ The Complete Biblical Library, Greek - English Dictionary.

Him. What the Husbandman - the Vine-dresser is promising is the loving care of His Vineyard and that from other passages we know that He will not fail in this care. Every believe will be fruitful or if not, he will receive the merciful ultimate discipline of a compassionate Gardner.

Care of the Vineyard.

John 15:2 **Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. [3] Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.**

Both Towns and Holman⁴ state that this passage is referring to believers. We know the following from other passages of God's word:

- It is very important to note that this is a section on **Fellowship**. Pruning in this chapter is not dire warning of suffering in eternal hell should the believer be fruitless. It is *not* a rebuttal of Eternal Security but rather a tough-love action by our Heavenly Father to purify our lives.
- I strongly disagree with Lenski that the pruning refers to believers who have abandoned the Lord or who having been fruitless will be damned to hell (read Lenski, the Gospel of John, pg 1029 on this).
- Note the reassuring tone of verse 3. This is certainly not a warning of losing one's salvation should the believer be unfruitful. It's very important for us to get this section straight for it deals with some very intimate portions of our relationship with Christ. If we choose to not deal with those times when we might be unfruitful or might turn our backs on the Lord then we *will* be disciplined by Him. That is a fact of life regarding our connection with Him. Another point to be made that the correct view of this passage will help us to minister to someone who has fallen or is not bearing fruit - See Galatians 6 on this.
- My comments: Christ will present the believer spotless before the Father - see Eph 5:27.
- The believer will never be abandoned - see ch 14, "I will not leave you as orphans." Romans 8 - at the beginning of that chapter the comforting message is clear that there is no condemnation to them who are *in* Chrst - a clear parrell to our illustration of the Vine in John 15. The believer will never be separated from the Lord's Love (vs' 35 - 39). There is nothing he can do to cancel his salvation.
- This section is all about our connection with Christ. It does include some "tough love" portions i.e.: the pruning reference (vs 2) and the dead branches being burned (vs 6) - a reference to the purging of our dead works and sin rather than calling our Eternal Security in Him into question.⁵

⁴ As does A. W. Pink. For those viewing this on the web, [click here](#) for Pink's excellent commentary on John 15.

⁵ See 1 Cor. 3:12 - 14; the Bema seat.

So let's take a look at the reference to pruning. The original refers more to a training of the branches and a cleansing work of the Husbandman than cutting away. I'd like to combine both references to "taking away" and "pruning" by way of an illustration given by J. Vernon Magee.

Dr. Magee made many trips to Israel and he noted an interesting exercise of the vine-dressers. Some of the branches grew near the ground and if left there would become dirty, insect infested and the grapes would be useless - rotting away if left on the ground. The

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husbandman would gently lift these branches from the ground and tie them off thereby training them in a nourishing way.⁶ This act would allow the rain to clean the branch and grapes and would bring them closer to the life-giving rays of the sun. I think this illustration may help to explain this passage. We as believers can be near the dirt of this world - our Heavenly Father will lift us up, tie us off nearer His nourishment and as a result, we become clean and fruitful. This experience from the vineyard becomes more vivid in verse three where Jesus told His disciples that they were clean through the word (from the Father) which He spoke to them.

The Fruit of the Vineyard.

John 15:4 **Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. [5] I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. [6] If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. [7] If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. [8] Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.**

The Progression of Fruit Bearing (Towns).

- No fruit (15:2)
- Fruit (15:2)
- More fruit (15:2)
- Much fruit (15:5).

Just what is this fruit? Towns and Holman refer us to Galatians 5:22, 23. Some have tried to tie fruitfulness to soul-winning. While I agree that one of the results of our relationship with Christ will be the winning of others to Christ as per Matt. 28:19, 20, Holman warns against this "dangerous" application of our passage.⁷ I can remember the anguish that I went through as a young believer over this issue. I wish that I could have had this passage explained to me with clarity then. I agree with Towns and for

⁶ M. Henry uses "born up" supporting this view.

⁷ See comments in Holman, pg 282 par 3, 4.

that matter, Holman along with other fundamentalist that at the beginning, many believers may have problems with fruit-bearing.⁸ I emphatically state that the Husbandman, our Heavenly Father will do His perfect job and see to it that these branches that are close to the ground will be lifted up and cared for.

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This imagery certainly does not construe a stern, loveless, merciless relationship with our Heavenly Father, but as with David, when he sinned by taking a census of the people, cast himself on the mercy of the Lord in a plague from the Lord rather than the other choices of defeat at the hands of his enemies or 3 years of famine. David said "Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great..."⁹ My point is this: there will be times when the Lord's children may be disciplined, severely, if necessary. This section is addressed to the disciples who are with Him at that moment. It is inconceivable that Jesus was posing a threat that if they were not going to be fruitful, they would be cast into hell and burned.

We will have to leave this passage today and pick it up next time. One final comment. I do not wish to minimize the severity of verse 6 - that comes later on. This should stand as a warning to the would-be casual believer; see Heb 12 - "scourge with a whip" - still an action of a loving Father rather than a vengeful God.

⁸ A. W. Pink suggests from the original that the branch in question was fruit-bearing but became fruitless - reinforcing this approach to vs. 6.

⁹ Read 2 Sam. 24.