

I AM the True Vine

John 15:1, 5

The 7th Great “I AM” of the Book of John is “I am the (True) Vine.”

The Context: Jesus has been declaring what has become known as the Upper Room Discourse (John Chapters 13-16), and Judas has left the upper room (13:20-30). At the last verse of chapter 14, Jesus says: “Arise, let us go hence” (John 14:31). It appears the Jesus and the eleven disciples were about to leave the upper room and head toward the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus will pray His great High Priestly prayer (John 17) and later be arrested by the mob led by Judas. Most Bible scholars believe John Chapters 15-16 are spoken in route to the Garden of Gethsemane. If so, Jesus and His 11 disciples went through the darkened streets of Jerusalem and then passed beyond the walls into the surrounding countryside. During this time of year (mid-April), the grape vines would have been beginning to blossom with the promise of fruit. As Jesus walked with His disciples, they would have seen these vines and their potential to bring forth fruit. Perhaps, Jesus took this occasion to teach an object lesson of the importance of being fruit-bearing disciples.

The 7th “I AM” declaration (John 15:1, 5): Jesus’ next recorded words (15:1) were: “I am the True Vine and My Father is the Husbandman (Vine Dresser; Worker of the soil).” Later (15:5a), Jesus uses similar words to declare this “I AM” again: “I am the Vine, you are the branches.” The Greek word, “vine” (Greek #288) is used 9 times in the New Testament and literally means a grape vine, but not exclusively so. It is used metaphorically of Jesus (John 15:1, 5) and of apostates who will experience God’s wrath in the last days (Rev. 14:18-19).

Jesus is the True Vine; all other vines are counterfeit. He alone is the source of everlasting, abundant life (as He possesses life within Himself). For as we saw last week, He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

In the Old Testament, a vine is used as one of the symbols of the nation of Israel (Psalm 80:8-10; Isa. 5:1-2, 5). Israel had not lived up to its intended purpose (Jer. 2:21; Hos. 10:1). Now, God has sent His Son into the world as the “TRUE VINE” to accomplish once and forever what Israel had failed to live up to concerning God’s intended purposes. This declaration, sets the scene for Jesus to teach His disciples about the most vital relationship they had (have) in their lives (one with Jesus and His Father).

The Teachings of The Vine and the branches (15:1-8): There are three main characters in the teachings of the Vine and the branches. God the Son- the Vine; God the Father- the Vine-Dresser, and the branches- fruitful, unfruitful, and not abiding branches.

- 1) Let’s look first at the **TRUE VINE (Jesus Christ)**. Jesus, by declaring Himself as the True Vine is clearly and deliberately contrasting Himself with Israel, the false vine. Jesus regularly taught parables using vineyard imagery concerning Israel (Matt. 20:1-16;

21:23-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 13:6-9; 20:9-16). The hypocritical religious leaders had led Israel into Judaism and Israel had become a false vine. Jesus pictures Himself as having been planted by God the Father. The Father was directing everything He did; having sent His Son to be the Savior of the world (I John 4:14). Jesus said that He only did the will of His Father; what the Father commanded, showed, or told Him to do; always pleasing His Father (John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:29; 14:31). As the True Vine, Jesus is the roots that establishes believers in their faith; gives believers life sustaining nourishment that builds them up in their faith, and enables them to become fruit-bearing believers (Col. 2:6-7). Interestingly, the Vine does not by Himself produce fruit, but enables the branches to produce the fruit (which could not be produced without being in Him- 15:4).

- 2) Second, the Vine-Dresser is God the Father: The Husbandman (Vine-Dresser; Gardener) is the One who has the responsibility of caring for the vineyard. Jesus says the Vine-Dresser is My Father (15:1). The Vine-Dresser is involved in everything that has to do with the vine. Besides the relationship of the Vine-Dresser (Father) and the Vine (Son) as stated above. In this passage, there are mentioned three specific duties of the Vine-Dresser (God the Father) in relation to the branches.
- 3) The third main character of this 7th "I am" declaration is (are) the branches. In specifying the duties of the Vine-Dresser, the three types of branches will be introduced and addressed. They are spoken of in 15:2 and 15:8.

a) "Every branch **in Me** that bears not fruit He takes away" (15:2a). The word "takes away" (Greek #142 eiro) means to raise; to lift from the ground; and/or to take up/away). God will take the unfruitful branch and lift it from the dirt (of this world into which it has fallen) giving it a chance to be productive (fruitful). If a believer gets to a place where that believer is unfruitful (barren), God will use chastisement in that believer's life to help that one become fruitful again for His glory. His chastisement is always proof of His love and of our relationship with Him (Heb. 12:6-8). By union with Jesus Christ (the Vine) and care of the Father (Vine-Dresser), the branches become fruitful.

b) "And every fruit-bearing branch, He purges it that it might bear more fruit" (15:2b). The word "purges" (Greek #2508) means to prune, cleanse, or purify and is only used here in the New Testament. He cleanses by purifying the fruit-bearing branches so that they will bear even more fruit. All branches need cleansing (both fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing); but it is God's Word that leads to the cleansing in either case (15:3; Psalms 119:9; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 4:12). The Father tenderly (and sometimes painfully) removes things from the branch (like sucker branches, useless buds, misdirected shoots, discolored leaves, spots, etc.) that saps its vitality or strength not allowing it to produce more fruit.

c) "If one (branch) abided (Aorist Active Subjunctive) **NOT in Me**, that one is cast (Greek #906-ballo- meaning to throw; cast) forth (Greek #1854 outside; without) as a branch and is withered (Greek #3583- dried up; wasted away); and gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (15:6).

This verse (15:6) is often misunderstood and misused. Commentators use this verse to teach at least three different things:

1) Many use this verse to teach that a believer can lose their salvation by not “Abiding” in Him. This is in direct opposition to what Jesus has taught many times before (including just after the 1st “I AM” the Bread of Life- John 6:36-40). This is a lie of Satan and we stand secure in Christ.

2) A second view of interpretation of this verse is one that I personally held for many years (and is held by many fundamental students of God’s Word). They understand God’s Word as teaching that these individuals are backslidden believers that are presently not living godly lives and will stand before the bema seat judgment of believers after the rapture and before the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom; having their works as believers judged, thrown into the fire, and burned (I Cor. 3:11-15).

3) A third view of interpretation of this verse is one that I believe best fits the context and Greek text of this verse. Jesus had just repeated the 7th Great “I am” of John (15:5). After declaring that “I am the Vine, you are the branches,” Jesus adds, “He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same (that one) brings forth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (15:5b). Then, Jesus goes on to say: “If one abided not in Me, that one is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (15:6). With “abided not in Me” in the Aorist tense (past; literally never abided in Me). He is speaking of an unbeliever that had not abided in Him and is destined to hell unless He believes in Him (Jesus Christ). The Bible teaching concerning “Abiding in Jesus Christ” as opposed to being “in Jesus Christ” is a whole additional study on its own (and beyond the scope of this “I am” study).

Much more could be said about this 7th Great “I AM THE TRUE VINE” declaration of Jesus in the Book of John. It is a declaration of RELATIONSHIPS (God the Father, God the Son, and believers (branches). It is a declaration of REPRODUCTION (No fruit, fruit, more fruit, and much fruit progression (15:2-8). It is a declaration of RESPONSIBILITY (Di-vine enablement produces fruitfulness in our lives). The key statement (without Me you can do nothing) is made by Jesus in this “I AM.” Fruit bearing is primarily a passive activity. It’s our relationship to the Vine and the Vine-Dresser (and the indwelling Holy Spirit) that produces spiritual fruitfulness in our lives and gives us the responsibility to be godly, reproducing branches for His glory.

Next week, I intend to look at the “I AM” statements in the Book of the Revelations. This will bring us to a completion of the I am statements in the New Testament.