

# Reflections on John 15:1-16



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 1

### The Husbandman

**“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (:1, 8).**

#### Introduction

In this series of studies we will look at the various aspects of the Christian’s life as presented by the Lord Jesus Christ in John 15:1-16. They will be broken down into segments so that we can get a good understanding of the issues involved.

#### The Husbandman

A husbandman was a crop farmer in Biblical days, though today the term refers to the agricultural practice of breeding and raising livestock, or animal farming.

From the outset the “husbandman” is identified as God the Father. Jesus states that His Father watches over and cares for the “vine”, that is Himself. The Lord Jesus is the “true vine” and we are the “branches” (:5). Therefore the Father in caring for the “vine” automatically cares for the “branches” in

the same way. Jesus became the “vine” so that we could become the “branches” and in turn glorify the Father as He does.

The Son of God, though He is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, came to offer us the privilege of becoming the children of God. This blessing can never become a reality until we surrender ourselves to His loving care by placing unconditional confidence in Him. Christ Himself lived a life of full dependence in His Father. **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise”** (John 5:19) ... **“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works”** (John 14:10). A life lived in this fashioned cannot but please the Husbandman. **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”** (Matthew 3:17) ... **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him”** (Matthew 17:5). This is perfect trust despite the coming cross and suffering. Therefore that Father was glorified in the Son.

The application

It is the responsibility of the gardener both to care for crop and the soil it is planted in. It is impossible to get a good crop otherwise. God has placed us in the most advantageous position possible, for if Jesus is the “vine” and we are the “branches” then there ought to be no reason for fruitlessness. This means that we can provide nothing for ourselves to be fruitful. **“For without me ye can do nothing”** (:5). So instead of looking to ourselves, we must turn our eyes to the Father and leave our lives in His capable hands. This is likely to be the hardest thing we are called to do, for we seem determined to work our passage to Heaven. We must believe that He is caring for us because an unkempt garden quickly become wild and unruly.

We must come to the place of utter helplessness and fully surrender our will to God. **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”** (Romans 12:1). Unless we do we will never bear the fruit the Husbandman expects. Until we allow Him to provide all the means for our growth our Christian lives will be stunted. **“A vineyard of red wine. I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day”** (Isaiah 27:2-3). Our calling in life is to serve God

How else can God be glorified? He is glorified by the fruit of those who have yielded themselves entirely to Him. As the gardener or farmer is honoured when people admire his display of produce, so the Divine

Husbandman is glorified when the world sees His nature in us. **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”** (Matthew 5:16). Let us constantly remind ourselves that everything to do with such growth come from God and not ourselves. Also, we can only glorify God if we stay within the patch of ground He has planted us in. **“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever”** (1 Peter 4:11). This means that we can only serve God within and according to the power He has given us. To do otherwise is to rob God of glory.

### Conclusion

It is the gardener who gets all the praise for the beautiful rose he has produced. It is the Father who received all the glory for the life we live in Christ. It is entirely beyond our power to grow in the Lord, for it is His work in us that produces the fruit. **“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”** (Philippians 2:13). Everything we need for the Christian life comes from Him. Are we prepared to take it?



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 2

### The True Vine

**“I am the true vine ... I am the vine”** (:1, 5)

#### Introduction

Unless we have holidayed abroad in some sunny climate, it is likely that we have only seen vineyards in books or on television. While here in the United Kingdom we do have fruit-bearing vines, the Scriptures refer to the one yielding grapes. Jesus points our attention to a living parable that has a message which describes Him in some way. Everything that God created are visible expressions of things in Heaven or portrays a heavenly truth. When He said, **“Consider the lilies of the field”** and **“Consider the ravens”** (Matthew 6:28 and Luke 12:24), He is telling us that there is an

important truth to be found in natural things. While we cannot find God in nature, we can read messages He has installed in it. **“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise”** (Proverbs 6:6).

The true vine

Jesus is the true vine. This means that there must be false vines too, which means that it is possible for people to be connected to something that is not part of the planting of the Lord. The **“wild vine”** will bring spiritual death (2 Kings 4:39-40). It also infers that natural vines are shadows of the true.

The teaching here is remarkably simple to understand. The Father [husbandman] planted the true vine [Jesus], so that branches [us] might bear fruit. Therefore a person must be in the one that God ordained to be the Saviour if he or she is to be saved and live a fruitful life. **“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6) ... **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

Being the true vine, He is the only one who can support and comfort us through life. **“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”** (Matthew 11:28-30). Just as Christ asked us to consider the flowers and the birds, so the apostle Paul tells us in Hebrews 3:1, **“consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”** The sad fact is that people today, even believers, are considering false vines [teachers and teachings] that will eventually destroy their souls.

The growth

The true vine provides everything we need to grow and bear fruit. All our sustenance passes through Him first before it comes to us, and the fruit we bear is the product of His Spirit in us rather than our effort or labour. Since it all comes from Him, we can be absolutely assured that we have the perfected ingredients for a successful Christian life. We attempt to obey His command to teach and preach the Gospel to all people, but it is still not our doing but His. **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”** (Matthew 28:19-20) ... **“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs**

**following**” (Mark 16:20). Until we come to realise that it is all Jesus, we will not be as effective as He desire, and we will continue to rob Him of His glory. It is time for the church to yield itself completely to the only one who provides what is necessary for growth. **“For in him we live, and move, and have our being”** (Acts 17:28).

### The Lord

Maybe we have never taken the time to think about Christ’s sovereign position in our lives and in the church. We claim to know Him as our Saviour, but do we know Him as Lord? This is the basic message of the vine parable. Unless He is Lord in reality our words and songs have a dull sound to them. The flesh likes to govern its own life, but we need to consider the fact that Jesus is the true vine and we are but grafted in to Him. This means that new life is exactly what the Lord says it is, for it comes directly from and through Him alone. **“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live”**(John 11:25) ... **“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”** (Romans 6:4). This means that we cannot be holy, righteous, just or fruitful unless we are in Christ.

### Conclusion

We will never truly live as God intended until we acknowledge and confess that He is the true vine and the true Lord. **“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”** (Romans 10:9) ... **“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”** (Philippians 4:13).



# Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 3

## The Branches

### Introduction

In this study we will look at the branches, what they mean and the role they play in producing fruit. In doing this we will find out exactly what the Lord Jesus is teaching us about the Christian life.

### The branch

**“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” (:2).**

The branch only finds existence because of the sustenance that the vine gives it. It cannot live or produce anything if it disconnected from the vine. The vine needs branches if it is to be fruitful itself. Therefore branch that fails to bear fruit brings dishonour to the vine, and has to be removed by the husbandman.

The branches share the same nature and life as the vine, and as such are not seen as separate entities to it, unless of course they become detached from it. As believers we are **“partakers of the divine nature”** (2 Peter 1:4) because we have **“the Spirit of Christ”** dwelling in us (Romans 8:9). To a certain degree we share His likeness, and ought to exhibit the same in this world. Nevertheless, we are totally dependent upon Christ for all things, for just as the vine feeds the branches, so too do we find our strength in Him. **“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”** (Philippians 4:13).

We must be content to simply be branches, for too many have desired to be the vine, only to find that their spiritual life withered and died. Our job is to receive everything the vine offers us to grow abundantly and produce much fruit. If faith works, then this is how it does.

### I and You

**“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” (:5).**

Notice how Jesus personalises the parable. Our whole Christian life finds its foundation on these two little words. It is Jesus and us, that is, a personal

relationship with Him. If we get the order right then our lives will be fruitful, but put ourselves first and we'll quickly be disappointed.

As branches we rest in and are secured by the vine. This is the Christian life explained in sheer simplicity, but in fact informs us of its greatest blessing. If we abide in Him, we will never suffer loss. If we submit to this formula then we will find that obedience, holiness and fruitfulness are not so difficult at all. In reality Jesus has done all the work so that we can be fruitful. We have simply got to stop trying to do the work of the vine.

We ought not to doubt about our salvation, for the One we are dependent upon is the True Vine that the Husbandman planted, therefore we are in the right place if we are attached to Him. Nor should we, as so many do, fear losing our salvation. How can we be lost if we continue to abide in the vine? Added to this is the knowledge that both the Husbandman and the Vine has ordained that we produce much fruit. **“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life”**(1 John 5:20).

Withered branches

**“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”** (:6).

The sad fact is, just as the parable states, there are some who branches that become divorced from the vine. So though the teaching is simple, there is a solemn side of it that cannot be avoided. The withered state can only be reached by those who refuse to abide in Christ and feel they can live the Christian life without His power. Maybe they started out well, but came to believe that good deeds and law-keeping would give them a fast route to fruitfulness. **“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? ... Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?”** (Galatians 3:3, 5:7).

We see then that it all comes down to not abiding in Christ, or what we may call holy obedience. Those who become withered are just happy that they said a sinner's prayer in an evangelical setting in the past. Jesus is just a ticket to avoid Hell. In a nutshell, they have never loved the Lord or truly worshipped Him from their heart, nor have they forsaken all to follow Him. **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or**

**what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Matthew 16:24-26). They became religious instead of Christian. Then as soon as tribulation arose, they began to wither away. **“And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away”** (Matthew 13:6).

There is no point to this parable if the branches were not first attached to the vine before they withered and died. The whole point is that it is possible for a believer to stop believing by allowing an **“evil heart of unbelief”** to cause their **“departing from the living God”** (Hebrews 3:12).

### Conclusion

Once again we have learnt that God has provided every means possible for our spiritual growth and fruitfulness. It is not His will for us to wither, but instead that we produce much fruit by abiding in Christ. **“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper”** (Psalm 1:3) ... **“Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing”** (Psalm 92:13-14) ... **“Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit”** (Jeremiah 17:7-8). Let us be always found trusting and obeying the Lord.



# Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 4

## The Fruit

### Introduction

The Husbandman planted the Vine, which in turn grew branches that were expected to produce fruit. Everything that God does is perfect and must be fruitful; otherwise there is no point of it being there. **“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it”** (Isaiah 55:10-11). In this study we will look at why we must, as the branches, bare fruit.

### Fruit

**“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”** (John 15:2).

Simply stated, the branch that continues to be unfruitful must be purged. The words “taketh away” indicate this and no amount of sidestepping the facts annuls the consequences of a godless life. If the branch is not removed then it becomes a hindrance to those that are developing, and it undermines the glory of the Gardener. The only branches that are cut away from the Vine are those that receive the sustenance but show no benefit from doing so. Just being connected to the Vine is insufficient grounds for existence according to Jesus. Why is it that so many fail to see that a fruitless life is one which is void of eternal life? Do they not understand that we are born again to live a godly life? **“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren”** (Romans 8:29). Surely this is the most glorious fruit any believer can bear!

It is the fruit that everyone notices, therefore if the fruit is nonexistent or rotten, then it reflects badly on the tree [vine] and the gardener. We wonder if the sad state of the church today is largely due to its members being rotten to the core and in reality have never submitted themselves to Christ. **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”** (Matthew 5:16) ... **“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly**

**lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation”** (1 Peter 2:11-12).

Jesus says that the branch that bears fruit will be purged, that is, cleansed and purified. The fruitless and the fruitful branches are not the same, therefore what applies to the one cannot be applied to the other; the first is pruned but the latter purged, [we will look at this in our next study]. Those who are fruitful are kept spiritually healthy, though it often includes a certain amount of suffering for being in a fallen world. Just as a plant is affected by pollution and disease, the believer becomes stained by the world by following its sin. This is where chastisement comes in. **“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth”** (Hebrews 12:6). God chastens His children so that they can reflect His glory rather than the world’s evil. He purges us of all that is harmful so that we can produce an even greater quantity of fruit. All that God expects of us is that we submit to His will and allow the life of Christ to flow through us.

Much fruit

**“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”** (John 15:5).

We read of **“more fruit”** and **“much fruit”** in John 15, therefore we can see that “no fruit” is unacceptable to the Husbandman. If we are truly **“in”** Christ, then it is impossible for us to be fruitless. Does this imply that working for God is being fruitful? Absolutely not! Otherwise we are promoting a works gospel. Machines work, but only a living plant can produce fruit. Religious people might do all the moral things that the Bible promotes, but they are as lost as the sinner. The branch might extend itself and grow large, but if it has no fruit it is a waste of space.

The Fruit of the Spirit must be seen in us after we are born again. **“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”** (Galatians 5:22-23), and can only be produced in them **“that are Christ’s”** and **“have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts”** (Galatians 5:24). Such believers are **“walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work”**(Colossians 1:10). In short, the Holy Spirit is operating in their lives instead of the desire of the flesh and the standards of the world.

## Abiding fruit

**“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain”** (John 15:16).

The word “remain” has almost the same meaning as “abide”, which means that the fruit produced by those who abide in Christ will never grow rotten or die. Natural fruit does not keep, but spiritual fruit is eternal, therefore what we accomplish through Christ will never be forgotten by Him. The more of the self-life that is cut away, the greater will be the fruit of the spiritual life, and so God is glorified even more.

The word “remain” also involves leaving a lasting impression on those around us. Our lives ought to glorify God in every instance. The world may hate us, but it cannot avoid the good believers have accomplished. **“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing”** (1 Peter 3:15-17).

## Conclusion

Is saying we are saved evidence enough of eternal life? The Scriptures reduce such a notion to ashes. God expects the saved to be fruitful. **“But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life”** (Romans 6:22). Instead **“we should bring forth fruit unto God”** (Romans 7:4), since we used to **“bring forth fruit unto death”** when we were without Christ (Romans 7:5). Let us not be found making excuses for our ungodliness or arguing against what the Bible plainly teaches. Let us be fruitful in Christ. **“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away”** (Psalm 1:1-4).



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 5

### The Pruning

**“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. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:2-3).**

#### Introduction

Almost every cultivated plant needs caring for and pruning. It needs to be cut back so that it can grow better and produce more fruit. In this sense subtraction is actually addition, for the gardener knows what is necessary for a bumper harvest. In fact, he knows more about the plants life than they ever could. We do not miss the obvious message for us here.

#### Cleansing and purging

The Husbandman must cleanse the branches of all that might hinder them being fruitful. There word “purgeth” means to prune away the worthless parts. With regards to a plant, it refers to the previous years shoots that will no longer bear fruit or flowers, so that only the healthy parts remain. If this is not done then these barren shoots will continue to take the sap that the productive parts need. The diseased parts of the plant are removed so that they cannot affect the rest. Everything that could hinder the plant is cut away.

Perhaps we are trusting in last year’s blessings and need to be pruned by the Lord so that we can be fruitful now and in the future. There are many who have stopped growing through trying to live on the blessings of a past revival or outpouring of God’s Spirit. Maybe to such people that era was the best of times, but they forgot that God can do it again and again. Throughout our churches we have believers who are barely existing on the blessing of a past experience and are forever retelling it in the hope of reviving the feeling

or emotion. Instead of always looking back, they need to look forward and expect God to abundantly bless again. It is possible that they will never be fruitful until they allow the Lord to purge away the past. “For this is one of the noblest rewards God can bestow on former acts of obedience, to make us yet more holy, and fit for farther and more eminent service” (John Wesley).

We cannot ignore the subject of sin here. Sin is the disease that will corrupt everything it touches unless it is removed. We may think that our private sin is doing no harm, but in fact it is destroying our spiritual life in secret. Sooner or later the evidence of a barren life will be plain for all to see. **“Be sure your sin will find you out”** (Numbers 32:23). Through the Holy Spirit’s influence we are made aware that we must **“lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us”** (Hebrews 12:1) if we are going to be useful to God. Therefore this pruning work is for our holiness. His dealing with sin in our lives is not pleasant to the flesh, but it proves that He loves us and wants us to be pure. **“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth”** (Hebrews 12:6).

The cleansing word

**“That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”** (Ephesians 5:26). How does the Husbandman cleanse us so that we are fit for His purpose? He does it with the pruning knife of His word, although He might allow trials and tribulations to cut through our complacency and waywardness too. It is God’s desire that we believe and obey His word rather than getting our attention through sickness, pain or difficulties. His knife is **“sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”** (Hebrews 4:12). It is only when it is believed and obeyed that the word of God can complete its cleansing work in our hearts. We will find it easier to stay pure if we allowed God’s word into our hearts. **“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”** (Psalm 119:11) ... **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth”** (1 Peter 1:22).

Just as we would submit ourselves to the surgeons scalpel to deliver us from a tumour, so too ought we do so with regards to the Husbandman’s knife. We call this “laying down our lives.” **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Matthew 16:24-26) ... **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by**

**the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).**

Conclusion

**“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).** If God is permitted to continue His work in us, then He will cause us to be fruitful in every area of our lives. Then it will not be if we will be fruitful, but how much fruit we will produce. Are we willing to be emptied of all that obstructs our growth? Are we willing to be purged of all that is offensive to God? Are we willing to be cleansed by His word? Until we are we will be no more than a waste of space. **“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10) ...“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).** The whole point of the cleansing and purging work of God is so that we can please Him by walking in holiness. **“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).**



## **Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 6**

### **Except Ye Abide**

**“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” (John 15:4).**

Introduction

We owe our existence in the garden of God to the Vine that the Husbandman planted. We are expected to remain connected to the Vine if we are to continue receiving the sustenance needed for growth. This

“abiding” means that a believer must remain in constant union with Christ, but what if a branch does not choose to abide? Some may argue against any actual falling, but to do so negates the necessity and the meaning of abiding in Christ. Is it not amazing that so many Christians want Jesus to abide constantly in them, but they dismiss the need of abiding in Him?

### Our union with Christ

This union with the Lord began the moment we became a “**new creature**” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and took the first step on the pathway called “**newness of life**” (Romans 6:4). At that point we removed ourselves from the world and promised to trust and obey Him for the rest of our lives. Through the new birth we became God’s children. “**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God**” (Romans 8:14). We speak of Jesus being in us and we in Him, a sacred union with our Saviour.

This parable of the Vine reveals something of the foundation of that union, and the consequences of not maintaining it. Just as the vine feeds the branches in the natural plant, so too does Christ supply us with all that is needed to produce good fruit. As soon as any branch is disconnected from the vine it cannot produce any fruit, but instead is useless and dying. Failing to observe Christ’s intended meaning here is self-deception at its worst.

The word “in” refers to more than simply being a member of a church, for it expresses the truth that we are literally part of the work of God in Christ. We have His life, “**I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me**” (Galatians 2:20). Such a union is almost as close as that shared by the Godhead, “**At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you**” (John 14:20). This union is maintained by the Holy Spirit in those that truly love, serve and obey the Lord. “**He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him**” (John 14:21).

### Except

The above thoughts are qualified by the use of the word “except” (unless). The word carries with it a condition. The condition has already been expressed by the Lord, therefore life and fruitfulness can only be maintained as long as we remain in Christ. If this is not the intended meaning, then we have to assume Christ was mistaken and the branch can produce fruit all by itself. Such a notion is as ridiculous in the spiritual as it is in the natural.

Plainly stated, there must be unbroken union between the Vine and the branches. “Keeping up of this vital connection is made essential to continued fruitfulness” (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown). There is no value to the exhortation if a believer can exist as a child of God outside of Christ. Just as Jacob with the angel, so we must cling to Christ if we are to continue in the blessing. **“I will not let thee go, except thou bless me”** (Genesis 32:26).

There are many who have removed themselves from Christ but remain in the church. They spend a lifetime struggling to produce the same fruit they see in those who are in union with their Lord. What they may produce is simply an imitation of the true, and it is brought about through good works rather than a natural outcome of being united with Christ. This can all change the moment they allow God to work a miracle and graft them back into the Vine.

There are others who are still attached, but barely. They are clinging on for dear life. They want the joys of Heaven, but still long after the world. Sooner or later these branches will fall from the vine too. **“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?”** (Matthew 6:24-25). “Those who abide not in Christ, though they may flourish for awhile in outward profession, yet come to nothing” (Matthew Henry). Yet the gardener can completely unite the branch to the vine again. It need not perish and suffer total removal; instead it can experience life and fruitfulness to its fullest once again. **“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent”** (Revelation 2:5).

The word “except” is given for us to understand that there is no exception to the rule in the Lord’s teaching. He does not modify His word to fit a person’s unscriptural view of salvation, commitment or holiness. **“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”**(John 3:3). None can produce fruit that glorifies God except those who constantly, unceasingly, unreservedly and completely abide in Christ. This does not take will power, but it is an act of the will, for it requires wholehearted devotion. **“With my whole heart have I sought thee”** (Psalm 119:10). It goes without saying that it will take wholeheartedness to abide in Christ. **“thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength”** (Mark 12:30).

## Conclusion

We cannot plant ourselves in God's vineyard; we cannot connect ourselves to the Vine; we cannot bear fruit by ourselves; therefore it is totally the work of God in us. **"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it"** (Psalm 127:1). Nevertheless we cannot avoid the plain and simple teaching of the text; we must constantly and wholeheartedly abide in Christ if we are to continue receiving His life and produce fruit. If our **"life is hid with Christ in God"** then we cannot expect His life to be fruitless and barren (Colossians 3:3). The Vine bears fruit through the branches, the fruit being the observable sign of its fertility and life. Branches full of fruit glorify the Husbandman. Does not the lack of fruit suggest the exact opposite? Abiding in Christ is the answer to any desire to backslide or any possibility of falling away. **"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"** (John 14:23).



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 7

### Nothing

**"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 ... Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples"** (John 15:5, 8).

## Introduction

**"Without me ye can do nothing"** are words that cut deep into the self-reliance of the flesh, for it seeks to work its own way to Heaven through good deeds and religious duty. The word **"nothing"** is absolute, no ifs, buts or exceptions. It is not only reference to spiritual matters, but also involves the secular too since we began to abide in Christ. The teaching of the Lord

in these verses have no borders or limitations, for He means exactly what He says, without Him we can do absolutely nothing worthwhile that could in any way please God.

### Dependence

It may be missed, but this truth is entirely within the scope of our relationship with Christ. If we abide in Him then **“nothing”** is taken out of the equation, but the moment a believer separates from Him it removes all chance of anything we do being acceptable to God. It comes down to whether we actually believe Christ enough to be totally and unreservedly dependant upon Him and His word. **“Without faith it is impossible to please him”** (Hebrews 11:6). We see how **“nothing”** and **“impossible”** are connected in relation to faith in the Lord. But when true faith is in evidence, manifested in our abiding in Christ, then **“nothing”** and **“impossible”** lose their strength. **“For with God nothing shall be impossible”** (Luke 1:37). **“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you”** (Matthew 17:20) ... **“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth”** (Mark 9:23).

It all then depends on our relationship with God, and this is not dissimilar to that enjoyed by the Father and the Son. **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself.”** This statement reveals that Jesus did not operate according to His own agenda or outside of the will of His Father, but indeed He went on to say, **“but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise”** (John 5:19). Everything Jesus said and did was totally within the will of the Father and the Holy Spirit, that is, He did nothing independent from them. **“Father, art in me, and I in thee”** (John 17:21) ... **“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work”** (John 4:34). If the Son of God could do nothing without the Father, it is certain that we can do nothing if we live any area of our lives apart from Christ. If we were totally committed and reliant upon the Lord, then along with the apostle Paul we could declare, **“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”** (Philippians 4:13). We may be helpless but we are not hopeless, **“For it is God which worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure”** (Philippians 2:13). Once we accept these facts we will know what it is to have a happy and blest life.

### Discipleship

If not abiding in Christ causes us to achieve nothing worthy, then it is certainly a product of disobedience on our part. We shall come to the topic of obedience more fully in a later study, but in our opening verses we see

the need to be a disciple of Christ if we are truly to glorify God. This is not claiming to be a follower, but actually and wholeheartedly being so in our words, thoughts and deeds. **“Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”** (Colossians 3:17).

True disciples bear good fruit, so those who produce no or rotten fruit are not Jesus' faithful disciples. The great figures throughout the ages that have brought nations to repentance, and the church to revival, are the ones who produced fruit that glorified the Lord. They were His true disciples that obeyed His commands, yet they did not achieve anything through their own will or personal charisma, instead it was Christ doing the work through them. **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following”** (Mark 16:15-20). They were not a special class of believer, instead they chose to abide in Christ and take Him at His word. He can do the same for us if we would be His true disciples.

Our heart desire ought to be concentrated on bear **“much fruit”** so the Father is glorified, for such is the evidence of true discipleship. Our trust can never be in our own strength to get things done, but in the power of the Holy Spirit which is given to all who obey Him. **“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”** (2 Corinthians 12:9). God gives us His strength to do what He commands. **“Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us”** (Psalm 68:28).

## Conclusion

We should not hesitate about taking our God-given position in Christ, for it is the only place where we can be abundantly blessed. If we want a fruitful life and to be full of the Spirit of God, then we must desire nothing less than unbroken abiding in Him, close union, perfect holiness and unreserved obedience. Are we followers trying to live apart from Christ, or are we disciples that constantly abide in Him?



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 (part 8)

### Answered Prayer

**“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you ... Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you”** (John 15:7, 16).

#### Introduction

Here we have a wonderful promise for those who truly abide in Christ, that is, their prayers will not only be heard but will be answered too. Those who constantly abide in Christ know His will, so therefore will not ask for anything that is contrary to this, and will find the promise continually being fulfilled throughout their lives.

#### Whatsoever

This “whatsoever” is conditional, for the “if” informs us that we must “abide in” Christ before the promise can be applied. There is a great need on dependence upon the Lord in every aspect of our lives. If we are unwilling to commit ourselves fully to Him we cannot expect, because we do not have the faith, to receive anything from God. **“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”** (Hebrews 11:6). Those who suggest that God answers prayers unconditionally are being dishonest with the Scripture. **“When I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not”** (Isaiah 65:12). Are we willing to do whatsoever the Lord asks of us? If so, He will do whatsoever we ask of Him.

Notice that answer to prayer is directly connected to bringing “forth fruit.” This means that there must be obedience on our part. This obedience may not involve powerful ministry, but it does call for constant and uninterrupted dedication to the Lord in our daily lives. Obedience always receives its reward, to say that God rewards those who constantly disobey are guilty of dishonouring and disrespecting Him.

Ask

Believers must pray. **“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint”** (Luke 18:1). How can we pray to God if we do not trust Him enough to commit our lives completely to Him? Prayer is more than saying religious words, which are usually meaningless and trivial most of the time, but the vocalisation of the heart’s dedication to the Lord. This does not mean that only the perfect obtain answers to prayer, for then nobody could effectively pray and be heard. **“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit”** (James 5:16-18).

How many there are who seek the fulfilment of this promise without abiding in God’s will! They are soon disappointed by unanswered prayer. **“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts”** (James 4:3). But those who ask according to His will are blessed with the joy of answered prayer. **“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full”** (John 16:24). Those who truly abide in Christ are never guilty of asking for that which satisfies their carnality, and if God would give them their desire, it would destroy their relationship with Him. **“They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul”** (Psalm 106:13-15). If we are firmly rooted in Christ we will automatically be living according to His will and in the most powerful faith possible. Notice that if God’s word abides in our hearts, then prayer is answered. Therefore those who serve Him need never fear asking God for anything that is legitimate. “This indwelling of His words in them would secure the harmony of their askings with the divine will” (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown). **“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”** (Hebrews 4:16). If we are going to ask then let us do so with this kind of faith. **“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them”** (Mark 11:24).

## The unity

Let us note the involvement of the Husbandman in all of this. He planted the Vine and expects the Branches to produce fruit to glorify Him; therefore will He not give each branch exactly what it needs to do so? It would reflect badly upon Him if He let a branch wither and die if He did not provide the sustenance it cried out for. Answered prayer glorifies God too.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united, but we can share in that unity by abiding in Christ, obeying His word and praying in faith. It has always been Christ's work to bring us to the Father. **“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6) ... **“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”** (Revelation 3:5), and it is the reason why He taught us to pray, **“Our Father .....**” (Matthew 6:9-15). The Father delights to answer the prayers of those who have dedicated their lives to Jesus. **“At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God”** (John 16:26-27). We have direct access to the Father through the Son, but what if we are not abiding in Him?

## Conclusion

Prayer only become lifeless when we stop abiding in Christ, but it never has to get to such a low level. If Christ has chosen us to bring forth fruit, then it is certain that He has chosen to answer our prayer too. If we are abiding in Him then prayer will be the most supernaturally natural thing in our lives.



# Reflections on John 15:1-16 (part 9)

## Perfect Love

**“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”** (John 15:9-13).

### Introduction

The apostle Paul tells us that love is the greatest attribute a person can have and that it fulfils the requirements of the law (1 Corinthians 13:13, Romans 13:10). The apostle John informs us that we can experience perfect love (1 John 4:18). In our opening text we can see the truth of this, for since **“God is love”** and we can **“do nothing”** without Christ, it follows that true Christian love is given to us directly from God (1 John 4:16, John 15:5). This love is **“shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost”** (Romans 5:5).

### Divine love

Exactly the same love that the Father has for His Son, is the love Jesus has for us. It is not different in measure, quality or kind or else it would not be the love Jesus speaks of. This must be love that knows no bounds or limitations. **“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”** (Ephesians 3:17-19). In line with the parable, whatever runs through the vine must be enjoyed by the branches too. Therefore love is not just a Christian sentiment but a spiritual reality for those who are abiding in Christ.

Though we might not fully understand how such love can exist in us, it ought not deter us from accepting this precious gift with all our hearts. It cannot be manufactured or worked up by the flesh, and it is impossible to receive it on account of good deeds, sacrifices or personal merit. Mere determination to operate in love will soon end in failure. Divine love or heavenly love has no comparison on earth. This love is all of God, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son”** ... **“But**

**God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**” (John 3:16, Romans 5:8), and is imputed to our soul as soon as we believe and accept Christ as Saviour, **“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

Abide in love

The fact that the Lord asks us to abide in His love reveals that we do not automatically do so. The personal experience of Christians throughout the ages is proof that few consistently abide in love. Also Christ’s words indicate that it is possible to live in a state of perfect love. It may seem too lofty an ideal for us, but is that not only a lack of faith on our part? Some call this the higher, deeper, fuller or abundant Christian life, and it is. This abiding in love is where holiness finds its foundation. We see then that this love is entered into at salvation, but it is important to realise that we have to grow in it too through obedience. **“And this is love, that we walk after his commandments”** (2 John :6) ... **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

By abiding in Christ’s love infers that we can know a victorious Christian life, for this love conquers all. **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 8:35-39). If we would take time to think about the consequence of abiding in love we would know the strength to get us through every one of life’s dilemmas.

We must not forget that abiding in love means that we must stay in it. The benefits it brings ceases to be ours when we purposely turn our hearts away and give our love to another. **“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him”** (1 John 2:15).

Lateral love

True love come from God to the human soul, and in return it responds by returning that love along the same heavenly channel, but love, like branches, must spread out too. Therefore we cannot abide in Christ’s love while hating those around us. **“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he**

**love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also”** (1 John 4:20-21). For love to be perfect it has to reach around the Earth as well as to Heaven. This love is not cheap like that of the flesh, instead it is sacrificial for it is willing to lay down life itself to win another to Christ, even as He in perfect love laid down His life for us.

Those who are partakers of Christ’s nature love instead of hate. Can we see then that love is a part of the fruit that is produced by the branches? **“The fruit of the Spirit is love.....”** (Galatians 5:22). It is one of the proofs that we are true followers of Christ. **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”** (John 13:35). Lateral love is a requirement rather than a suggestion; therefore we cannot abide in Christ without it. If we are not abiding in Christ’s love then we are abiding in death. **“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”** (1 John 3:14).

#### Conclusion

As the Father loves Jesus, and Jesus loves us, so we must in turn love others. From the Vine to the Branches into the Fruit. If the fruit is sour then that person might never come to the tree again. God perfectly loves Christ; Christ perfectly loves us; we must perfectly love others. This is only impossible if we are not abiding in the vine. If we are wholly committed to loving, obeying and serving God then we will continually exhibit what the Husbandman is longing to see; perfect fruit.



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 (part 10)

### Obedience

**“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love”** (John 15:10).

## Introduction

We have noted in previous studies on John 15 that there is a need for obedience to Christ and His word in the believer's life. We see in our text that obedience and love are inseparable, meaning that it is impossible to say we are abiding in the Lord if we do not love Him, and we cannot claim to love Him unless we obey His word.

## If

The "if" states the condition that must be kept or else we are operating outside of Christ. Surely a person of true trust and commitment to Christ would never object to hearing of the need for obedience. Someone who wants to know the abiding presence of the Lord would be delighted to fully surrender or consecrate themselves to Him. **"I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word ... And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved"** (Psalm 119:16, 47). How can anyone commit the safekeeping of their souls to God if they are unwilling to trust Him enough to faithfully follow His word? Is it that those who reject the need for obedience actually love their sin instead of the Lord? **"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved"** (John 3:20). Therefore everything that would hinder our relationship with Christ must be cut off, just as the parable of the vine indicates, and is in fact the only way we can truly please God. **"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"** (Hebrews 11:6) ... **"Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"** (Hebrews 12:14).

The "if" is the hinge the door to the deeper or fuller Christian life turns on. It all depends on if we think that keeping Christ's commandments are too difficult for us or not. If we feel that it is impossible to keep His word, then are we not actually walking in faithlessness instead of faith? In fact are we not on the threshold of calling God a liar? **"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"** (1 John 5:3-4). If we reject obedience then we are guilty of rejecting the Lord Himself.

## Our model

There is a foolish notion that is prevalent amongst some which teaches that Christ's sacrifice covers our wilful disobedience from the point of salvation. Somehow they think that they are continuously fit for Heaven regardless of what evil they do on earth, that because they consider themselves the elect,

they can never lose what Christ has given them. The elect are made up of those who love and obey the Lord with all their heart, soul and strength; anything short of this is a figment of the imagination and another gospel. To obey the Lord takes purpose of heart, the will and total surrender to Him. Instead of obedience being tiresome, as many think it is, we will know and experience God's enabling and sanctifying power in our lives. Plainly stated, obedience is easy for those who love the Lord.

Maybe we think that Jesus automatically obeyed His Father just because He Himself was God. So whenever we say that Jesus obeyed God, our minds tell us that there was no real difficulty in Him doing so, but how mistaken we would be! **“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered”** (Hebrew 5:8). We find that Christ surrendered His will to the Father as He came to the cross. **“O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt”** (Matthew 26:39). The apostle Paul in Philippians 2:5-8 writes, **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”** Can we see then that He is our role model for obedience? His obedience made salvation possible, and to enjoy eternal salvation we must be obedient to Him. **“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”** (Hebrews 5:9). Obedience “was the secret even of His own abiding in His Father's love!” (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Bible Commentary).

Christ completed the work of salvation on the cross, but it is our responsibility to obey Him by living daily according to His commandments. **“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”** (Philippians 2:12-13). He as the **“forerunner”** (Hebrews 6:20) has laid out the path that we are called to follow. **“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”** (1 Peter 2:21).

## Conclusion

The believer who wants to abide in Christ desires to be in the centre of God's will, and just like Jesus, as portrayed by the psalmist, we live to obey Him. **“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart”** (Psalm 40:8 see Hebrews 10:8). Surely that would be the place of

blessed peace for any true Christian. If we see the connection between the **“if ye”** and **“even as I”** we will come to the conclusion that living the abundant life is simply not possible unless our unity with Jesus includes unconditional obedience to Him too. Love evidenced by obedience is the unbreakable link we have to the Lord, but love without obedience is not the love spoken of in Scripture. **“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments”** (1 John 2:3).



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 (part 11)

### Abiding Joy

**“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full”** (John 15:11)

#### Introduction

We can see in our text that joy can “remain” or abide in us, not by half measures but in full. It is Christ’s own joy, which must be eternal, that can make our joy complete. It is His abiding presence in us that makes the Christian life happy and joyful.

#### Christian joy

This joy is not of this world, it cannot be worked up, and it does not come through events. The world’s joy is mere happiness [happen-ness] that ebbs and flows like the tide. The joy our God gives us is eternal and cannot be removed by anything or anyone. **“Your joy no man taketh from you”** (John 16:22). So the Christian life can be joyful or truly happy if we abide in the Lord.

Many believers only know the Christian life as a heavy burden. They put great effort in trying to be good, but inside they are sad, miserable and dying. The Christian life to them is lifeless and harsh, but they dare not walk away from it for fear of losing eternal life. So they get into a rut that gets deeper and darker with every step. They will read books about “The Dark

Night of the Soul” which only confirms to them that life is meant to be dreary and unhappy for the Christian, when all the while Scripture teaches the exact opposite. The wearisome life they lead saps any power they might have.

This is not to suggest that the Christian sails through life on a carpet of rose petals. It is true that **“all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”**(2 Timothy 3:12), but that does not mean we cannot have joy. The Lord Himself had that inner joy that was not diminished by suffering. **“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”** (Hebrews 12:2-3). Such joy is the victory of the soul, for despite the problems that surround us, we can still go through them with joy in our hearts. **“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places”** (Habakkuk 3:17-19), because **“the joy of the LORD is[our] strength”** (Nehemiah 8:10). We can therefore **“count it all joy”** when difficulties come our way (James 1:2).

### Christ's joy

It has to be Christ's own joy in us or else it would not abide a single hour in us. **“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. 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”** (John 15:4-5). This joy is a portion of the fruit which comes by abiding in the Vine, and it is evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. **“The fruit of the Spirit is ... joy”** (Galatians 5:22). Therefore it is the Vine's nature and work flowing through us when we have inner joy in the face of a storm. It should have an impact on our character and demeanour every day.

It cannot be anything short of Christ's joy in us or it will never find completeness in our soul. Jesus prayed that we might know such joy as this. **“And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves”** (John 17:13). If we substitute it with common happiness then we will find a sharp tongue or an evil glance will quickly remove it. The joy we speak of is the joy that Heaven rejoices in. **“The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty;**

**he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing”** (Zephaniah 3:17). It is the same joy experienced by the angels when a sinner comes to Christ. **“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”** (Luke 15:10), and will be manifested by God when His people stand before Him, **“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”** (Jude :24). It is in fact Heavenly joy that fills our souls, and such joy is contagious.

### Conclusion

This joy increases until it is full. It is **“exceeding joy”** that we need rather than moments of delight or merriment (1 Peter 4:13). This joy is only made possible through fellowship with Christ. It has to be joy to the highest possible degree. **“That your joy may be full”** (1 John 1:4, 2 John :12). The Lord is more than willing to constantly pour this joy into our spirits if we would but believe and abide in Him. **“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”** (Psalm 16:11). We can be in spirit of rejoicing every day of our lives. We can have this joy and know that there is no possibility of anyone stealing it from us. We will not stop rejoicing until our joy is full. **“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice”**(Philippians 4:4).



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 12

### What a Friend we have in Jesus!

**“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his**

**lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you”** (John 15:13-15).

## Introduction

One of the amazing consequences of being saved is that, not only do we become the children of God, but we also are entitled to be called the friends of Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ is the best Friend we will ever have and that friendship will endure throughout eternity.

## How did it begin?

Our friendship with Christ is solely the work of God, for no man could come up with the idea that he might be a friend, rather than a mere servant, of God. According to our text this friendship is based firmly upon love, not the human kind, but the divine. The Bible teaches us that **“God is love”** (1 John 4:16) and **“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son”** (John 3:16). The manifestation of God’s love was in motion before we came under its influence. **“God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). This love brought us new life. **“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins”** (1 John 4:9-10).

The Husbandman planted the Vine and He expects the branches to remain connected to it. This relationship is more than unity, for man can be united in a cause but not in friendship with other members. We can say without any exaggeration that our friendship with Christ is His life flowing through us. Therefore this friendship is spiritually charged with unconditional love. How can we not be overwhelmed with joy to hear from the mouth of the Lord, **“Ye are my friends”**? In that He speaks of sacrificial love for us, we must see that Jesus is placing Himself at our disposal for eternity. He gave His life as a demonstration of this love to prove that there can be no greater love relationship than this. **“There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”** (Proverbs 18:24). He died that we might live. If we are reading these verses correctly we must conclude that Christ did not die for strangers but for His friends. Do we see that He was our Friend long before we were His friends? He literally calls Himself the **“friend of ... sinners”** (Luke 7:34).

How is it maintained?

Those who suggest that there is no condition connected to this friendship have a cheap view of divine love. Jesus reveals that there has to be concrete proof of this friendship in action, which is obedience. We see then that this love relationship must flow both ways. He gave His all for us, and He simply requires us to trust Him enough to obey His word. This thought is exactly the same as the one we encountered in :10, **“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.”** This means that we must come to terms with the fact that we are called to lay down our lives for the Lord. **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Luke 9:23).

Though He is always our Friend, friendship with Christ cannot be maintained by us if we do not actually follow Him and obey His word. **“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him”** (1 John 2:15). But do we in the natural obey our friends? Such a thought never enters our minds. True friendship is not based on servitude but loyal love, so our obedience to Christ is not borne out of duty but is a display of heartfelt love. Obedience here is rooted firmly in our personal relationship with Him. Then obedience is not a burden but a blessing.

How deep is it?

In light of our text we clearly see that this friendship with Christ knows no holy limitations or boundaries, or as Paul says, **“To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge”** (Ephesians 3:19). This is intimacy with the Lord that has no measurable height or depth.

Friends tell each other what is on their hearts, and even secret things. Jesus tells His friends divine truths that are kept secret from the world. Our relationship transcends servanthood, for a master does not tell his servants intimate and personal details. Instead as Christ’s friends we are given the privilege of understanding the wisdom of God. **“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God”** (1 Corinthians 2:9-12). We can know God’s will instead of dashing blindly

through life. We experience the direct leading of the Holy Spirit and have that inner witness which comes from faith in His word.

John 5:20 reads, **“For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.”** This makes the closing words of our text mightier still, for the Lord promises to make known to us spiritual truths. **“Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand”** (Luke 8:10).

#### Conclusion

It is to our shame that we do not desire such a deep friendship with Christ as this. Therefore it is our own fault if our spiritual lives are powerless, joyless and without the enjoyment of God’s love. What an honour to be called the friends of Jesus! How it must sadden Him when we do not follow through by replying to His love with obedience to Him. God has been calling friends to Himself since the beginning. **“Abraham believed God ... and he was called the Friend of God”** (James 2:23). This same call goes out to us today. Shall we turn a deaf ear to His voice?



## Reflections on John 15:1-16 - Part 13

### Chosen

**“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you”** (John 15:16).

## Introduction

In this final study on the parable of the vine we will see something of our position in Christ and how we came to be there. There are two important words found in our text, chosen and ordained, which inform us of the plan and purpose of God in saving us. There are some who see a mythical elect in this verse, but that is far from what Jesus has been teaching through the passage. We cannot isolate a text from its context otherwise we will find ourselves sinking in the mire of error.

## The Chooser

The Vine chooses the branches and the position they will hold. The Lord chose us while we were sinners and in a position where we would never have even thought of choosing Him. **“We love him, because he first loved us”** (1 John 4:19) ... **“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him”**(John 6:44). We often hear believers say that they chose Christ as their Saviour, but in reality we can only choose to serve Him after He has chosen us. Once we have been chosen then we can choose to follow Him or not. **“Choose you this day whom ye will serve”** (Joshua 24:15). Matthew Henry writes, “Let us state the matter impartially to ourselves, weigh things in an even balance, and then determine for that which we find to be really true and good.”

He chose to be our Saviour even though we do not deserve the price He paid to redeem us. **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”** (1 Timothy 1:15). This choosing took place before the foundation of the world. **“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace”** (Ephesians 1:4-7). The word for chosen in Greek is “exelaxasthe” meaning “pick out”. It is vital that we note that God’s choosing does not bulldoze its way through man’s free will. His choosing presents us with a choice to either accept or reject the invitation to serve Christ. This means that God calls us but we must choose to believe in Him. **“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”** (Acts 13:48).

This choosing becomes effective the moment that the Gospel is presented and believed. **“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning**

**chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). God in His sovereign grace has chosen to allow man the free will to reject the truth. Therefore it is always personal faith in Christ that actually saves when man accepts, and true faith must be an act of the will. **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:8-10). Faith is not the gift here but rather the gracious offer of salvation. **“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”**(Romans 6:23) ... **“If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water”** (John 4:10).

The chosen

We have been chosen to live our lives the way God has intended, that is, to bring forth the greatest fruit of all which is to be like Jesus. **“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son”** (Romans 8:29). This predestination only begins its transforming work the moment a person exercises faith in Christ. We have been chosen to live holy lives that please Him. **“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”** (1 Peter 2:9).

The Lord teaches us two important truths that reveal His reasons for choosing us. Firstly, that we are to be fruitful, and secondly, that we will know the power of answered prayer. The fruit we bring forth, which must be holy and acceptable to Him, will endure throughout eternity. That which we do for His glory will never be forgotten and we will enjoy the blessing of the reward. Those who abide in Christ will have their prayer answered. We can only be assured of answer to prayer if we willingly abide in Christ, **“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”** (John 15:7).

We have been chosen to take the same message of salvation to the world and tell them that God has chosen them to come to Him by accepting Christ. This means the chosen are then ordained [appointed] to be Christ’s heralds. **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”** (Matthew 28:19-20). For it is certain that God is **“not willing that any**

**should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9). We cannot ignore the obvious fact that in the first instance the Lord is speaking of the choosing of the twelve and their ordination into His service. “They did not choose him, but he them, in order that they might bring forth abundant fruit in the conversion of the world” (People’s New Testament Commentary). His words apply themselves to all the Lord calls to Him.

In light of our study in John 15, we can see that the chosen ones must abide in Christ and in His word. Failure to do so will forfeit the blessings of God’s calling on our lives. **“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son”** (2 John :8).

### Conclusion

Christ chose us for a purpose and it is certain that He does not do so without giving us the power to obey Him. He chose us, but we must in turn choose to serve Him in our daily lives. We are not robots that are programmed to perform a certain task, but instead are free agents who decide whether to bend our will to His or not. **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”** (Romans 12:1-2). Chosen, yes, but let us continue to walk worthy of such a high calling. **“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall”** (2 Peter 1:10).



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