

## I. John 15:1-27 – After Supper Discourse: Episode One

### A. John 15 – An introduction

1. A review of events from John 13:18 to John 14:31
  - a. The disciples were all shocked to hear news of a **traitor** among them. John 13:18-30
  - b. Jesus told the disciples to love one another, and, in this way, show they were true **followers** of His. John 13:34-35
  - c. They were stunned to hear Christ was going to **leave** them. John 13:36
  - d. Peter claimed he would die for Christ, but Jesus told him that before the break of dawn he would **deny** Him three times. John 13:37-38
  - e. The disciples were disappointed that Jesus would not immediately present Himself as **king** and set up His earthy kingdom. John 14:8-9
  - f. Jesus imparted peace to His alarmed and **anxious** disciples. John 14:27
  - g. Before eating the Passover, the disciples argued who would be the **greatest**, but Jesus showed them true greatness through serving. Luke 22:24-27
2. The setting of this section
  - a. Jesus and His disciples had just **left** the upper room and were walking on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane located on the Mount of Olives. Jesus may have stopped occasionally for final and important discipleship moments. John 15-17 records in great detail these important after supper discourses by Jesus.
  - b. Jesus was very near the time of His arrest, trial and crucifixion for our sins. There remained only a few short **hours** before the night would be shattered by the arrival of soldiers led by the traitor Judas Iscariot.
  - c. Just before their world came unglued, Jesus gave last minute **instructions** to His beloved followers. After Jesus's arrest they would need a solid hope on which to stand.
  - d. Jesus taught these truths with the full knowledge that that very night all the disciples would **abandon** Him, and Peter would publicly disown Him three times. Matthew 26:31,56; Mark 14:50-52; John 16:32
  - e. Jesus was aware of the disciples' **frailty**, just as He is aware of ours. He loved them just as He loves you. Psalm 103:13-14, 138:8
3. Your background, previous teaching, and even your personal study will greatly influence your **interpretation** of the upcoming passage of John 15. In view of this reality, here are some factors to consider.
  - a. Some people interpret this passage as a stern **warning**.
  - b. Some interpret this as a **judgement** passage.
  - c. Some interpret this as a discussion on how to **distinguish** believers from unbelievers.
  - d. Some take this teaching to be about the **loss** of salvation.
4. In contrast to these views, the authors of this curriculum believe this passage was written to believers and was meant to teach them how to live **fruitful** lives.
  - a. We do not believe this passage is a warning, a judgment, a comparison of saved versus unsaved, or a teaching on the loss of salvation. We prayerfully trust you will attentively **consider** our perspective.
  - b. With this said, if you disagree with our interpretation and find through your studies that the Bible teaches differently, then we encourage you to stick with the scriptures and not these notes. The **scriptures** are infallible; these notes are not.
5. There are several important terms that appear in this passage that we should define.
  - a. What is meant by "the **vine**," mentioned three times in verses 1, 4 and 5? The answer, Jesus Christ.
  - b. What is meant by "the **branch**," mentioned five times in verses 2, 4, 5, and 6? The answer, a believer in Christ, a born-again Child of God.
  - c. What is meant by "**to bear**," mentioned six times in verses 2, 4, 5, and 8? The answer, to yield fruit.
  - d. What is meant by "**takes away**," mentioned once in verse 2? The answer, to lift up.
  - e. What is meant by "**prunes**," mentioned once in verse 2? The answer, to purge or cleanse.
  - f. What is meant by being "**clean**," mentioned once in verse 2? The answer, to be saved. See John 13:10-11
  - g. What is meant by "**fruit**," mentioned six times in verses 2, 4, 5 and 8? The answer, good works.

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- h. What is meant by “**abide**,” mentioned ten times in verses 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10? The answer, to remain in fellowship.
- i. What is meant by “**fire**” and “burned,” mentioned in verse 6? The answer, divine discipline.
6. The **characters** involved in this analogy
- Jesus **Christ** is the *vine* or the *true vine*. John 15:1, 4-5
  - God the **Father** is the *vinedresser*. John 15:1
  - Believers** are the *branches*, for the following reasons:
    - The branches are spoken of as being **in Christ**. John 15:2.
    - In verse 3 Jesus told the disciples that they were already **clean** (believers) and then in verse 5 He told them that they were the branches.
  - The unnamed **workers** in John 15:6 are those who gather and burn dried and withered branches. They carried out this type of work in the fall of each year.
7. The context of this passage is fruitfulness, not salvation. At this point in the narrative of John’s gospel the disciples were all believers. Equally true is that they were failing in their walk and spiritual productivity. We must **distinguish** between salvation and discipleship.
- Salvation happens at a point in time when we are justified, or declared righteous before God, whereas discipleship **increases** over a lifetime as we are sanctified, or made righteous, in conduct through daily steps of faith in Christ.
  - Salvation is eternal deliverance from sin’s penalty, whereas discipleship is daily deliverance from sin’s **power**.
  - Salvation is non-revocable, whereas discipleship can either progress or **regress**.
  - Just before He departed, Jesus laid out for His disciples their potential to be either fruitful or regretfully unfruitful. This passage teaches **degrees** of fruitfulness among believers. This passage shows our relationship to Jesus regarding fruitful Christian living.
8. Understanding middle eastern grape **cultivation** as practiced in the time of Christ
- There was a vinedresser who was typically the **owner** of the vineyard.
  - There was always a main **vine** or grape plant. Sometimes there were several, but in Jesus’ metaphor in this section of John 15, there is only one vine.
  - Many limbs sprouted from each vine. These branches were spring shoots that would bear the grapes that would soon develop. The **grapes** did not grow directly on the main vine, only out on the branches.
  - In preparation for a bountiful harvest of grapes, branches had to be **lifted**, or propped up for support.
  - Then there was the process of **cutting** off (cleansing, pruning or purging) untamed shoots or abnormal growth from fruiting branches. This was a help to them to bear better grapes.
  - There was the process of **waiting** for the vines to produce. In John 15, some branches gave no fruit (15:2a), others bore some fruit (15:2b), some bore more fruit (15:2c), some bore much fruit (15:5) and some bore fruit that remains (15:16). Matthew 13:8
  - In the fall of the year, dead limbs were removed from the vineyard. Typically, under the direction of the vinedresser, after the growing season workers cut out and removed unproductive branches. These were then **burned** outside the vineyard.

## B. John 15:1-8 – Abide in Christ

- John 15:1 – “*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.*” To correctly understand this analogy, we must keep in mind the **metaphor** of Jesus as the vine and the Father as the vinedresser. The wonderful aspect of having God as our vinedresser is His detailed devotion to the spiritual health of every individual branch. Isaiah 5:1-8
- John 15:2 – Since the branches are in Christ (*Every branch **in Me***), we know they are believers. 2 Corinthians 5:17
  - John 15:2a – *Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away* AIRO... This sounds like God removes the believer who does not bear fruit. It sounds like believers who do not bear fruit can lose their salvation, but the Greek word AIRO can also legitimately be translated ‘**to lift up**.’
    - Here are some **examples** of how AIRO has been translated *takes up* or *takes away*: In Matthew 9:6, AIRO was translated *pick up (your bed)*, in Mark 16:18, *pick up (serpents)*, in Matthew 16:24, *take up (your*

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cross), in Mark 13:16, *get (his coat)*, in Luke 8:12, *takes away (the word)*, and in Matthew 25:28, *take away (the talent)*.

- 2) The vinedresser usually handles branches in the **spring**, during their growth spurt when they are not bearing fruit. At that time, he lifts the branches and ties them to runners or props them up on rocks in hopes of a bountiful harvest in due time.
  - b. John 15:2b – “... *and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.*” The vinedresser **prunes** (cuts on, gives trials or even suffering) to the branches that bear fruit so they will bear even *more* fruit. If a branch could speak, it might deem this procedure cruel and unfair, but it is good. Romans 8:28, Hebrews 12:5-11
3. John 15:3 – “ *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*” The disciples had already been purified by salvation through faith in the word that Christ **preached** to them. Jesus did not doubt His disciples’ cleansing in salvation. John 13:5-9
  - a. John 13:10-11 gives valuable insight into Christ’s statement here: “ *Jesus said to him, ‘He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely **clean**; and you are clean, but not all of you.’ For He knew the one [Judas Iscariot] who was betraying Him; for this reason, He said, ‘Not all of you are clean’.*” Matthew 26:24, John 6:64-65
  - b. Additionally, in Ephesians 5:25-26 Paul said, “ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having **cleansed** her by the washing of water with the word.*”
4. John 15:4 – “ *Abide **MENO** in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.*” Just as an unconnected branch cannot bear fruit, so also a believer cannot bear fruit apart from a vital connection to Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, we must **abide** in fellowship with Christ.
  - a. So, although we are clean through the word of Christ, we must abide in fellowship in order to bear fruit. This makes abiding an issue of faith and dependence on the Lord, not an issue of works and obedience. Obedience is a **fruit** of faith and should not be taught as a synonym for abiding.
  - b. This term for abiding **MENO** has to do with our fellowship with Christ and not our position in Christ. The command to **remain** has to do with our fellowship, which fluctuates, and not with our relationship with the Lord, which is already secure.
  - c. This concept can be likened to one’s relationship to his or her parents. You will always be a son or daughter of your parents, a relative or an offspring. You cannot change that. But you may or may not be consistently enjoying **friendship** with them.
5. John 15:5 – “ *I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*” To abide in Christ is to **depend** by faith on Him and His gracious provisions for you. 2 Peter 1:3, Romans 1:17, Galatians 2:20b
  - a. Jesus Christ is the vine who produces the fruit that we as branches **bear**. The branch is completely dependent on the vine for life and fruit bearing. This analogy parallels walking by the Spirit as found in Galatians 5:16.
  - b. The spiritual **works** that Christ produces through us are called the *fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5:22-23) and are contrasted to the evil *works of the flesh*. Galatians 5:19-21
  - c. Apart from Christ and His enabling **power**, we can do nothing to please God. Acts 21:19; Romans 7:18, 25a; Ephesians 5:18b; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 3:5
  - d. At this juncture, the disciples were not what we would call fruitful. They really needed to hear these teachings and learn to abide in fellowship with Him. It is our **decision** to abide or not abide, but it must be clearly understood that without abiding in Him no Christian can please God or do anything good. Romans 7:18; Hebrews 10:38, 11:6
6. John 15:6 – “ *If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*” We see here that Jesus was talking about dried-up branches, referring to believers who **lose** their usefulness because they refuse to abide in Christ. Such a believer will be disciplined.
  - a. A believer who decides not to abide in fellowship with Christ faces a sad consequence. He or she becomes as **useless** as a dried-up branch that is going to be thrown into a fire and burned. When believers do not abide in Christ, by default they are living according to their flesh. Nothing good ever comes from that. Galatians 6:7-8

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- b. The word fire here does not refer to hell; it refers to strong **discipline**. The believer who does not abide in fellowship with Christ will face discipline and loss of future rewards. 1 Corinthians 5:3-13, 11:30-32; Hebrews 12:6; 1 John 5:16-17
- c. Jesus said **they** (plural) gather the dried-up branches and throw them into the fire to be burned. God uses other believers in this discipline. 2 Samuel 7:14 describes how God can do this, “*I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men .*”
7. John 15:7 – “*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you .*” Jesus promised to **answer** the requests of those believers who abide in Christ and are being filled with His word. Colossians 3:15-17, Psalm 37:4, Proverbs 3:5-6
- a. Obviously, a believer who is filled with God’s word and abiding in Christ will **agree** with God’s will and not have selfish desires. The concept of abiding in Christ makes this blank check promise of God rational. Romans 8:26-27, 12:2
- b. It is interesting that this promise is found right in the middle of Jesus’ talk on bearing fruit and abiding in Him. Through God’s word we learn His **will** and can then pray accordingly, both for ourselves and for others. Romans 12:2, Ephesians 6:18-20, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-11, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12
8. John 15:8 – “*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples .*” To become a child of God a person must believe the gospel, **not** bear fruit. You don’t become a child of God by bearing fruit. Ephesians 2:8-9
- a. However, God is **glorified** when His disciples bear fruit. This shows they are healthy growing disciples. Every child of God ought to become fruitful. That is God’s will.
- b. The disciples were about to go through three days of severe pruning. Forty days later, they would begin to experience an immense **harvest** of souls. Acts 2:41, 47
- c. As observed in this passage, we should make our goal to abide in Christ and not to produce fruit. To focus on fruit production is to misunderstand this passage. In order to bear fruit, the disciples needed to abide in Christ. Fruit bearing is a passive **product** of actively abiding in the vine, Jesus Christ. Galatians 5:16
- d. If you want to bear abundant fruit, fruit that brings glory to God, fruit that lasts, and fruit that proves you are Christ’s **disciple**, then abide in the vine by actively depending on the Savior, Jesus Christ. Galatians 2:20b

## C. John 15:9-11 – Abide in love

1. John 15:9 – “*Just as the Father has loved Me; I have also loved you; abide in My love .*” Throughout His ministry, Jesus loved the disciples in the **exact** same manner, and to the exact extent, that the Father loved Him. Jesus commanded His disciples to rest in His love for them. Sometimes like children we need to be told what is good for us.
2. John 15:10 – “*If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.*” Jesus commands us to **keep** His commandments so we can abide in His love. John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 2:3
- a. The Christian life is somewhat circular. We must keep God’s commandments in order to abide in His love, but in order to successfully keep His commandments, and therefore abide in His love, we must abide in fellowship with Him. He is the **source** of our energy to serve. John 15:4-5
- b. For us to be able to keep, guard or treasure any of Christ’s commands, we must **abide** in Him in the same way He abided in fellowship with the Father.
- 1) 1 John 2:6 – *Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.* How did Jesus live? He **lived** every moment of His earthly life in complete dependence on the Father, who was then able to accomplish His will through Jesus. Acts 2:22
- a) John 5:30 – *I can do nothing on My **own** initiative ... because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*
- b) John 6:38 – *For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who **sent** Me.*
- c) John 8:28 – *I do **nothing** on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me .*
- d) John 12:49-50 – *For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore, the things I speak, I speak just as the **Father** has told Me .*
- 2) We absolutely cannot love the Lord and keep His commands without the **strength** God gives us as we abide in Christ. John 15:4-5, Romans 15:18, 1 Corinthians 15:10, 2 Corinthians 3:4-6



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3) 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 says, “ *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us **eternal** comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word .”*

3. John 15:11 – “ *These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full .”* We cannot have true joy apart from abiding in Christ and keeping His words. Jesus taught these truths so that our joy would be thorough and complete. Let us all gladly maintain **close** fellowship with Him.

Philippians 2:2

a. We see in this passage **four** benefits that come from abiding in Christ.

1) John 15:7 – A life that is marked by answered **prayer**

2) John 15:8a – A life that **exalts** God

3) John 15:8b – A life that **bears** abundant fruit

4) John 15:11 – A life that is filled with the **joy** of the Lord

b. True joy begins at salvation (Phil. 1:25) and it **grows** as God teaches us through His word, as we abide in fellowship with Him, and as we experience His transforming power in our lives. Psalm 51:12, 1 John 1:4, Romans 15:13

c. Contrary to what we easily think, God’s ways are not burdensome or a drudgery. Walking according to God’s word results in peace, joy and life because His paths are **good** and perfect. Jeremiah 21:8; Romans 6:21, 23; Galatians 6:8