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John 15 New Living Translation (NLT)

John 15:1–17 Through this extended metaphor of the vine and branches, Jesus set forth the basis of Christian living. Jesus used the imagery of agricultural life at the time; i.e., vines and vine crops (see also Matt. 20:1–16; 21:23–41; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 13:6–9; 20:9–16). In the OT, the vine is used commonly as a symbol for Israel (Ps. 80:9–16; Isa. 5:1–7; 27:2–6; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:1–8; 17:1–21; 19:10–14; Hos. 10:1–2). He specifically identified himself as the "true vine" and the Father as the "vinedresser" or caretaker of the vine. The vine has two types of branches: 1) branches that bear fruit (John 15:2; 8), and 2) branches that do not (vv. 2; 6). The branches that bear fruit are genuine believers. Though in immediate context the focus is upon the 11 faithful disciples, the imagery also encompasses all believers down through the ages. The branches that do not bear fruit are those who profess to believe, but their lack of fruit indicates genuine salvation has never taken place and they have no life from the vine. Especially in the immediate context, Judas was in view, but the imagery extends from him to all those who make a profession of faith in Christ but do not actually possess salvation. The image of non-fruit-bearing branches being burned pictures eschatological judgment and eternal rejection (see Ezek. 15:6–8).

Jesus, the True Vine

15 "I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

John 15:1 I am the true vine. This is the last of seven claims to deity in the form of "I am" statements by Jesus in the Gospel of John see 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 9; 10:11; 14; 11:25; 14:6.

John 15:2 he takes away. The picture is of the vinedresser (i.e., the Father) getting rid of dead wood so that the living, fruit-bearing branches may be sharply distinguished. This is a picture of apostate Christians who never genuinely believed and will be taken away in judgment (v. 6; Matt. 7:16; Eph. 2:10); the transforming life of Christ has never pulsed within them (John 8:31–32; cf. Matt. 13:18–23; 24:12; Heb. 3:14–19; 6:4–8; 10:27–31; 1 John 2:19; 2 John 9). he prunes. God removes all things in the believer's life that would hinder fruit bearing, i.e., he chastises to cut away sin and hindrances that would drain spiritual life just as the farmer removes anything on the branches that keep them from bearing maximum fruit (Heb. 12:3–11).

⁵“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!⁸When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

⁹“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. ¹⁰When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.¹¹I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! ¹²This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. ¹³There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. ¹⁶You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

John 15:4–6 Abide in me. The word “abide” means to remain or stay around. The “remaining” is evidence that salvation has already taken place (1 John 2:19) and not vice versa. The fruit or evidence of salvation is continuance in service to him and in his teaching (John 8:31; Col. 1:23; 1 John 2:24). The abiding believer is the only legitimate believer. Abiding and believing actually are addressing the same issue of genuine salvation (Heb. 3:6–19). For a discussion of the perseverance of the saints, see note on Matt. 24:13.

John 15:6 The imagery here is one of destruction (cf. Matt. 3:10–12; 5:22; 13:40–42; 50; 25:41; Mark 9:43–49; Luke 3:17; 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20:10–15). It pictures the judgment awaiting all those who were never saved.

John 15:7–10 True believers obey the Lord’s commands, submitting to his word (14:21; 23). Because of their commitment to God’s word, they are devoted to his will, thus their prayers are fruitful (14:13–14), which puts God’s glory on display as he answers.

John 15:9–10 Abide in my love. Cf. Jude 21. This is not emotional or mystical, but defined in John 15:10 as obedience. Jesus set the model by his perfect obedience to the Father, which we are to use as the pattern for our obedience to him.

John 15:11 your joy may be full. Just as Jesus maintained that his obedience to the Father was the basis of his joy, so also the believers who are obedient to his commandments will experience the same joy (17:13; cf. 16:24).

John 15:13 This is a reference to the supreme evidence and expression of Jesus’ love (v. 12), his sacrificial death upon the cross. Christians are called to exemplify the same kind of sacrificial giving toward one another, even if such sacrifice involves the laying down of one’s own life in imitation of Christ’s example (cf. 1 John 3:16).

John 15:14–15 friends. Just as Abraham was called the “friend of God” (2 Chron. 20:7; James 2:23) because he enjoyed extraordinary access to the mind of God through God’s revelation to him, which he believed, so also those who follow Christ are privileged with extraordinary revelation through the Messiah and Son of God and, believing, become “friends” of God also. It was for his “friends” that the Lord laid down his life (John 15:13; 10:11; 15; 17).

John 15:16 I chose you. Cf. v. 19. In case any pretense might exist among the disciples in terms of spiritual pride because of the privileges they enjoyed, Jesus made it clear that such privilege rested not in their own merit, but on his sovereign choice of them. God chose Israel (Isa. 45:4; Amos 3:2), but not for any merit (Deut. 7:7; 9:4–6). God elected angels to be forever holy (1 Tim. 5:21). He elected believers to salvation apart from any merit (Matt. 24:24; 31; see notes on Rom. 8:29–33; Eph. 1:3–6; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:2). bear fruit. One purpose of God’s sovereign election is that the disciples who have been blessed with such revelation and understanding should produce spiritual fruit. The NT describes fruit as godly attitudes (Gal. 5:22–23), righteous behavior (Phil. 1:11), praise (Heb. 13:15), and especially leading others to faith in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God (Rom. 1:13–16).

The World's Hatred

¹⁸“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. ¹⁹The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. ²⁰Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. ²¹They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me. ²²They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³Anyone who hates me also hates my Father. ²⁴If I hadn’t done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. ²⁵This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures^[a]: ‘They hated me without cause.’

²⁶“But I will send you the Advocate^[b]—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. ²⁷And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry.

John 15:18–19 Since Satan is the one who dominates the evil world system in rebellion against God (14:30), the result is that the world hates not only Jesus, but those who follow him (2 Tim. 3:12). Hatred toward Jesus means also hatred toward the Father who sent him (John 15:23).

John 15:20 servant . . . master. That axiom, spoken also in 13:16, reflects the obvious truth that led Jesus to inform his disciples. They could expect to be treated like he was treated because those who hated him don’t know God (15:21) and would hate them also; and conversely, those who listened with faith to him, would hear them also.

John 15:22–24 they would not have been guilty of sin. Jesus did not mean that if he had not come, they would have been sinless. But his coming incited the severest and most deadly sin, that of rejecting and rebelling against God and his truth. It was the decisive sin of rejection, the deliberate and fatal choice of darkness over light and death over life of which he spoke. He had done so many miracles and spoken innumerable words to prove he was Messiah and Son of God, but they were belligerent in their love of sin and rejection of the Savior. See Heb. 4:2–5; 6:4–6; 10:29–31.

John 15:25 Jesus quotes Ps. 35:19; 69:4. The logic here is that if David, a mere man, could have been hated in such a terrible manner by the enemies of God, how much more would the wicked hate David’s perfect, divine Son who was the promised king who would confront sin and reign forever over his kingdom of righteousness (see 2 Sam. 7:16).

John 15:26–27 when the Helper comes. Again, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit (7:39; 14:16; 17; 26; 16:7; 13–14). This time he emphasized the Spirit’s help for witnessing—proclaiming the gospel. See note on 16:7.

Footnotes:

- a. 15:25 Greek *in their law*. Pss 35:19; 69:4.
- b. 15:26 Or *Comforter*, or *Encourager*, or *Counselor*. Greek reads *Paraclete*.