

John 15

THE TRUE VINE.

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

It was a powerful moment, when Jesus rose to leave the Upper Room where He had eaten the Passover meal. This must have produced a powerful effect upon the hearts of His disciples. Up to this period they had been a united and a peaceful band, and the beloved Master was yet with them; what a separation awaited them in a few hours! The assembly broke up but no one moved; they stood in silence around their Lord. He again opened his lips, and delivered the following discourses, perhaps the upper room was decorated with the foliage of the vine. According to Josephus, on the door of the temple 70 cubits high which led into the Holy Place, was an artificial vine spread out, the branches and leaves of which were made of gold, and clusters of diamonds and pearls. Perhaps the comparison of the vine could have sprung from the juice of the grape which had just been used to represent his blood during the last supper. After the Lord distributed the fruit of the vine to represent the blood that should cleanse from all sin, He then declared, "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God is come," what would be more natural than for him to say, "I am the true vine?"

So Chapter 14 ends with:

John 14:31 But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

The words, "Arise, let us go hence" were a signal to make ready for their departure but when they all had arisen, He continued His discourse as He stood with the little group around Him, with their sandals and outer robes girded upon them. This is exactly how the original Passover was eaten in haste.

Exodus 12:11 And thus shall ye eat it; *with* your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it *is* the LORD'S passover.

So as they were standing, the Savior, out of His full heart, spoke the words that are contained in the next three chapters, closing with the 17th.

You and I are then to picture ourselves, the Master with the eleven apostles, in the dimly-lit chamber, standing, girded for departure; and they, eagerly watching every look and gesture, and drinking in every word, while he begins, "I am the true Vine."

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

On the table from where they had just risen was the "fruit of the vine," and the Lord had said that he would never drink it again upon the earth. That may have been the occasion of the striking figure that he now uses, in which he exemplifies union with Christ. In the Old Testament the Vine is often used as the type of Israel, planted and tended by the Almighty as the husbandman, cf:

Isaiah 5:1 Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

Psalms 80:8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.

Jeremiah 2:21 Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?

Israel, however, had proved to be a wild and fruitless Vine. Instead of it, therefore, Christ has now been planted by the Father as the True Vine. He is the true Bread, the true Light, as well as the Good Shepherd. All these figures express some of His relations to His people and the world. The Vine stands in a much closer relation to the branches than the Shepherd to the sheep. The latter cares for the sheep, but the Vine imparts its life to the branches and there is one life in the whole, the branch having no life except as it draws it from the vine. The relation is similar to that expressed by Paul when he describes Christ as the Head of the body, and the servants of Christ as the various members of that body, all pervaded by the life and will of the Head, cf:

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

Colossians 2:19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

My Father is the Husbandman. God had planted the old Jewish Vine, which was not the True Vine, but "a figure of the true."

Hebrews 9:24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

God had also sent his Son, the True Vine, into the world, or "planted" him, and his care was always over the Son and has been ever since the Vine was left to grow and fill the earth. "God giveth the increase."

John 15:2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

As the husbandman cuts off the unfruitful branches of the vine, so the Father severs the unfruitful branches from his Son. Judas, an unfruitful branch which did not have in it the life of the Vine, had just been severed and had gone forth. So any branch that ceases to have the life of the true Vine and bear fruit, and that becomes lifeless and barren, is cut off. It often dies and drops off from the Church, which is the earthly representative of the True Vine, of its own weight and is lost out of sight. Sometimes it is needful to cut it off lest it injure the other branches. Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it. The husbandman prunes and dresses the branches in order that they may be more healthy and fruitful. The Father cleanses, purifies, frees from sin, all who become branches of the True Vine. The means employed to cleanse them from sin and impurity is next described.

John 15:3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

The spoken word is the instrument appointed by God for the cleansing of the soul. Anyone who hears the word, believes it, receives it into his soul, obeys it and makes it the rule of his life, is "cleansed," or freed from sin. The "Word" tells the sinner what to do in order to receive the remission of sins, cf:

Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

It is God in Christ who cleanses, but the means employed is the "Word," which must be received in obedient faith.

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

The idea is, Abide in me that I may abide in you. Christ abiding in us is dependent on our abiding in Him. We abide in him by keeping his words, or having his "word abide in us" (verse 7), and all who "keep his sayings" (chap. 14:23) will have Christ abide in their souls. We must prepare ourselves for the presence of Christ by loving Him.

"If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and *make our abode with him.*"

These are the steps: 1. Love Christ; 2. Keeping the words of Christ; 3. The Father's love; 4. The Father and Son come to *abide* with the one who loves and obeys. We are dead, fruitless branches, without the Christ-like-life. The whole history of the world demonstrates that fruitfulness is only found in union with Christ. Where are the colleges, hospitals and benevolent institutions that have been reared by infidelity? What fallen and savage race has infidelity lifted up? What has it done for mankind? Where are its fruits, or the benevolent fruits of heathenism or false religions? There was not a hospital or benevolent institution to help the poor and needy in Rome, the capital of the world, when it was visited by Paul.

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

He has already declared in verse 1 that He is the True Vine, but He had not yet declared that every disciple is a branch of the Vine. Had he not declared, "Ye are the branches," they might have concluded, a little later, separate

congregations were organized in various portions of the earth, that these were the branches; or denominationalism might be able to speak of "branches of the churches of Christ;" but the relation is a much nearer, sweeter one.

Every Christian is a branch of the Vine. His life is drawn directly from the Vine. If he clings to the Vine, keeps Christ's words, so that Christ abides in him, and he has the life of the Vine, and the same bringeth forth much fruit. But the branch that is severed from the vine is not only fruitless but dies. So the disciple, without Christ, can do nothing but the Apostle Paul declared, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

John 15:6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

The lifeless, fruitless branches in the vineyard are lopped off and carried out, and wither and are burned. So, is anyone who does not abide in Christ. They are severed from the Vine, and *they* meaning the angels at the great judgment day cast them into the fire and they are burned. The Lord sweeps on over time to the eternal judgment and fate of the dead branches. Note 1. These have been or were once branches of the Vine; 2. They did not "abide" in the Vine (Greek *remain*); 3. Hence they were cast forth; 4. Hence at the end they are gathered, by the angels, to be burned. Hence there may be a falling away by those who have been branches of the Vine, or "a falling from grace," and hence the need of watchful, prayerful diligence that we may abide in the Vine.

John 15:7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

This promise is given unto the Apostles. The promise given unto us is a little different cf:

I John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

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

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, shall glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Those who are fruitful show that they have the life of the Vine and thus demonstrate that they are true disciples.

John 15:9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

Love opens the heart of the disciple to Christ that he may abide there

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, 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

And hence the union of the disciple with Christ may be as close as that of Christ with the Father. The Lord next tells how they shall "continue" or abide in His love.

John 15:10 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.

He abode in the love of the Father by a life of perfect obedience. So we must always strive to abide in His love. The willful, disobedient disciple cannot dwell there. Only He in whose heart Christ is enthroned as King. To keep Christ's commandments is, not to obey those that suit us, but to follow Him and obey all He says. Some set aside His commandment to be baptized.

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

Strange words, that one about to be crucified should speak of his joy! His joy was union with and the presence of the Father. He had "anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows." He desired His disciples to have that joy, the constant uplifting by the sense of the presence of Christ. If Christ abode in them, His joy would remain in them.

John 15:12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

They must love one another. The thought developed is, 1. Love the bond that unites Father and Son. 2. Such love the bond that unites the Son and the disciples. 3. How much love must also exist between the disciples in order to unite them? Mutual love, instead of the iron chain of Old Testament commandments, binds them together.

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

The highest human exhibition of love that earth has ever seen was this. Fathers have died for their families; mothers for their children. Christ was about to exhibit this highest human type of love by dying for His friends but He did even more, as Paul shows us, cf:

Romans 5:6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

He died for enemies, something that no man had never done. They are His friends, if they obey Him. That is the condition. You may "lay down your life for Jesus" without dying. If you live to consecrate your life to the Gospel, you give, possibly, a higher proof of love.

John 15:15 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.

Christ's disciples serve Him, but their service is not bondage, but that of love. Hence, they are friends instead of servants. They have His presence abiding in them and the will of the Father is made known to them.

John 15:16 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.

Each one of the eleven apostles present had been chosen, called, by the Lord, from among His disciples. They did not choose Him, but He choose them, in order that they might bring forth abundant fruit in the conversion of the world. The same is true, in part, of each disciple. Christ calls them by the

gospel, and if they hear and obey, then they are called and chosen to His work. The Lord selected every apostle, and called them to become His representatives in the church when He had ascended his heavenly throne. Peter, Andrew, James and John were taken from their boats and nets at the Sea of Galilee; Matthew from his place at the receipt of custom, the rest of the eleven from their various callings, and, last of all, Saul of Tarsus was arrested by the Lord himself on the way to Damascus and told that he was to become "a minister and a witness" to the Gentiles. As God chose Noah to build the ark, Abraham to found the Jewish nation, Moses to be its law-giver, David to leave his flocks and be its king, the Baptist to prepare the way for Christ, so the Lord chose out the apostles and ordained (appointed) them to their special work.

So, too, I cannot doubt that He chooses servants in all ages to become the leaders in great works which are called for by the interests of His kingdom. Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name according to the will of God He heareth us. If at any time their own arms are too short they are authorized to call for the help they need in Christ's name. This help is to the end that they may bear fruit, or be efficient in the work of converting men. The principle that underlies the promise is of general application.

We Have Learned

- 1. The life of the branch springs from the life of the vine. The branch does not give life to the vine, but the vine to the branches. Even so Christ is our life.**
- 2. If the connection between the branch and the vine is severed it will at once die. As the sap must flow from the vine into the branch to give it life and keep it alive, so the life of the True Vine must flow into our souls. Christ is not only the fountain of our life, but we must abide in Him in order to maintain it.**
- 3. Whatever works of active kindness and love done by the church, or by Christians, serves to honor and glorify Christ. It is because it is His life in us that works and bears fruit. Without Him we can do nothing.**
- 4. Christ and sin cannot abide in the heart together. If sin abides there, Christ will not enter; if Christ abides there, sin can find no room.**

5. *The work of Christ is for the good of man.*

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

John 15:17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

"These things" are all the precepts the Lord had spoken since the interview began with chapter 13. Indeed, to fill the heart with earnest, active love, love to God and to man, is the great end of the mission of Christ.

I John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Romans 13:8-10 Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. 9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

I Corinthians 13, is the love chapter. Remember the Old English word "charity" really means love and the whole chapter become clear.

John 15:18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you.

The world, as used by the Savior, means the unconverted, unspiritual, sensual, selfish and worldly portion of mankind, nearly all of the human race at the time that He spoke. Of that world the spirit of evil was the prince, and the kings and rulers of the earth were his willing servants. When the Lord was about to begin his ministry the prince of the world tempted Him with the offer of worldly glory and empire, and when the offer was rejected Satan became His bitter enemy. The world hated Him because He rebuked its sins.

John 15:19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

It is the nature of all intelligent persons to love the best what is in sympathy with themselves. Christ loves most tenderly the disciples who obey His commandments and seek to be like Him. The world loves those best that are in harmony with its ambitions, aims and pleasures. Hence, when the church lowers itself to a worldly standard it becomes worldly. John the Baptist and Christ might have chosen smooth paths that would have secured worldly favor, but their rebukes of sin brought them to death, and in every generation the great army of martyrs, have been hated and persecuted cf:

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: **13** But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

I John 3:13-14 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. **14** We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

I John 4:4-5 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. **5** They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

John 15:20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

Servant is not greater than his lord. For this admonition to which the Lord refers, cf:

John 13:16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

Matthew 10:24 The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord.

Luke 6:40 The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

The servants who represent the Master, show his spirit, obey his commands and do his work, must expect similar treatment to that which the world would award to the Master Himself. They represent a spirit and policy that comes into direct collision with the world. This has been the experience of all devoted proclaimers of the gospel, from Paul down to our own day. See in Paul's experience, cf: Acts 13:32-45

John 15:21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

The name of Christ, so sweet to His followers, is an object of hatred to His enemies. Not many months passed after these words were uttered until those that now heard Christ were under arrest by the Sanhedrim and were asked by the high priest, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" Then Peter answered, "By the name of Jesus Christ, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you whole." Then, after a conference, the Sanhedrim "commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus" cf: Acts, chapter 4. Again, in Acts 5 they are arrested cf:

Acts 5:28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

Acts 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

What was true of the first age of persecution has been true of later ages. The Roman emperor, Diocletian, declared that he "would abolish the Christian name from the face of the earth." The infidel Convention of France, at the time of the Reign of Terror, tried to destroy all that would recall His name, and there is nothing that excites the animosity of the haters of Christ more intensely than His name. One ground of the intense hatred of the Jews to "the name" was that Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Christ predicted by the prophets, and the use of this "name" was a constant indictment of them for crucifying the "Holy One" of Israel. They had rejected him because they

knew not God, God who had sent Jesus into the world, though they professed to honor Him.

John 15:22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

There are three principals involved in this declaration. 1. The degree of sin is determined by the measure of our opportunities. Those in total darkness cannot be blamed for not seeing unless they are responsible for being in the darkness. Those who have had no light from heaven will be lightly judged for breaking laws of which they could have no knowledge. 2. Increased opportunities bring the consciousness of sin. A ray of sunlight in the chamber reveals the spots. They were there before. So, too, "Without the law sin is dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." Rom. 7:8-9. So the knowledge of Christ, flooding the soul with light, brings sin into full view and takes away all excuse for continuance therein. Henceforth it is known, conscious sin. 3. The sin of sins is the rejection of Christ. He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He has not only shed his blood to cleanse from all sin, but comes to men and pleads with them to let him be their Savior. He who refuses him chooses, deliberately chooses sin, as his portion. He declares by the rejection of Christ that he clings to his sins and will abide by their consequences. By the rejection of Christ he shows himself a stubborn and determined rebel against the King of kings. Had heaven offered no mercy, showed no love, sent no Lamb of God to take away sin, there might have been less, or even no responsibility for sin. Ignorance might be an excuse, but when the offer of pardon is made and refused ignorance cannot be pleaded. Christ's offer takes away every excuse and leaves the sinner at the judgment day to the sentence of condemnation. Men are lost because "they will not have life.

John 15:23 He that hateth me hateth my Father also.

This follows from the fact that Christ is Immanuel, God with us, the manifestation of the Father. As Christ is revealed to us, so is the Father. Everyone who hates God in Christ, hates the Father who sent Him. The Jews thought they did not, but they did.

They knew not God, but worshiped another god whom their own imaginations had created. Christ was the manifestation of the God of their Fathers, but when they saw Him they hated Him.

John 15:24 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

The attestation of his divine mission was such that they were without excuse. His whole life work, including His sin-less-ness, His divine teaching and His superhuman signs, were such as no man had ever seen. They therefore demonstrated that he was more than man..

John 15:25 But *this cometh to pass*, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

This gratuitous hatred, this hatred of Christ by men because they hate God, this hatred of God because he has manifested himself and proved himself to be love, is something which passes all our conception, and yet which would not mean anything to us if our conscience did not bear witness that the possibility of it lies in ourselves. Such a hatred is only possible to nations which, like the Jewish, is full of religious knowledge and of religious profession."

John 15:26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

He shall testify of me. One principal office of the Spirit is to testify of Christ. All true Gospel preaching is Christ centered and magnifies the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

John 15:27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

The apostles were double witnesses. They had been with Christ "from the beginning" and knew all the facts. If He had been a deceiver they would have known it. If He was true they knew it. When He was risen they were witnesses of the fact. If they had never received the Comforter they could

have been witnesses of the facts of His life, death and resurrection. But when the Holy Spirit was given, the dark things made plain, the Scriptures understood, power from on high sent upon them, and when they could speak with tongues and work miracles, then also the Holy Spirit in them bore witness. There was their witness as men, eleven competent witnesses to every fact, and then in addition there was the divine witness through them. They still testify.

Every true Christian life is a witness to the living power of Christ. It must be kept clearly in mind that there is not the slightest intimation in the Scriptures of a testimony independent of those who have received the Spirit through the acceptance of Christ.

Sources: KJV, e-Sword, Clarke's Commentary, and B.W. Johnson Commentary.