

146. The Gospel of John—15:1-8

"The Vine and the Branches" Part 7

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

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For the last few weeks, we have been studying John 15 verses 1 through 8 presenting a series we have entitled, "The Vine and the Branches".

I believe this is one of the most important studies we as Christians can undertake because the whole Christian life is about bearing fruit for the glory of God.

Jesus told His disciples in this discourse that this is what the Father desires from His children's lives and that this is what He is actively trying to produce (through 'pruning')—that we bear more and more fruit in our Christian lives.

However, as soon as many professing Christians today hear that we are presenting a series that teaches Christians what spiritual fruit is and how they can produce more of it in their Christians lives—they shut off their brains because they're not interested.

You see, the whole premise of fruit bearing is that—I have to do something, something that blesses others and not me (fruit is for others to benefit from)—and that doesn't interest many modern-day churchgoers. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Look, if I was to advertise a series entitled—"How to be happy in five easy steps" or "The 10 principles to success in life"—we'd be packed.

What most people don't understand is that—**when you put yourself at the center of your life and make everything revolve around you—you'll never find true happiness, fulfillment, or success in life—at least in the eyes of God.** That is because those things come as by-products of a Christ-centered life—a life that seeks to give and not get, and to serve instead of being served by putting the needs of others above your own.

Warren Wiersbe in his book, "The Five Secrets of Living" said this—

"The secret of living is fruit bearing. God did not create you and Christ did not die for you that you might go through life getting. God created you and Christ purchased you that you might invest your life giving. If you refuse to bear fruit, you will miss the true meaning and glory of the Christian life. If you yield to Christ and permit His life to create His fruit through you, then you will really live. Are you willing to be a branch? Tell Him that you are. Are you willing for His life to work in and through you? Then tell Him. By an act of faith, yield yourself to Christ for the purpose of bearing fruit, for the purpose of fulfilling that wonderful plan God has for you and you alone."

REFLECTION: The Father desires that His children bear fruit in their Christian lives. What does that mean to you?

This morning we want to continue looking at our vine and branches series. So far in this series, we have looked at: **Jesus** being the ‘**True Vine**’ (verse 1) and the **Father** being the ‘**Vinedresser**’ (verses 1-2)

John 15:1-2, 8 (NKJV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit... ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

As we have been saying, the goal of the Vinedresser is that we bear more and more fruit. One of the reasons the Father desires us to keep bearing fruit is because—**He doesn't want us to become complacent which would be detrimental to our walk.** From a practical standpoint we need to keep producing fruit—and that requires a constant commitment to tend your heart.

If you've ever done any gardening, you know that—it takes a lot of effort to grow things. Once you have filled your garden with all kinds of beautiful plants, flowers or vegetables—you can't just stop working in it.

Every gardener knows that after all the hard work of cultivating the soil and planting the seed (or seedlings)—if you become complacent and stop tending that garden—before long, the weeds start to grow up and they will choke out and destroy everything beautiful that took so long to grow.

REFLECTION: Why would "complacency" be detrimental to your Christian walk?

The same is true with the garden of our hearts and lives for God—the moment we become complacent in our Christian walk (stop going to church, stop reading our Bibles, stop doing our devotions and stop serving the Lord in ministry)—that is when the *weeds* begin to grow again and choke out everything the Spirit has grown in our lives.

You say—“*What are the weeds?*” → They are sin, compromise, and carnality—

1 John 2:15-17 (NLT2)

¹⁵ Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. ¹⁷ And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

The devil is constantly trying to use the world and our flesh (fallen sinful nature) to get us to fall into sin and

choke out the fruit of the Spirit in our lives—and be careful that you don't make the mistake of thinking that we're only talking in terms of 'big' sins.

REFLECTION: Think of some examples of 'weeds' that get into your spiritual life.

Solomon warned us that "*It is the little foxes that spoil the vines*" (Song of Songs 2:15)—or in other words, it's often not the 'big' sins that are the problem in the Christian life—it's the 'little' sins that rob us of our fruitfulness for God.

Those would include lying, covetousness, gossip, and laziness—which are not little sins in the eyes of God but sins that often fly under *our* 'moral radar' because in our mind they don't seem like a big deal ("*They can't be that bad—everyone is doing them!*").

REFLECTION: Do little sins really matter?

What often leads to carnality, backsliding and sin in our lives as Christians is—slowing down and getting lazy in our walk:

Titus 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

Galatians 6:9 (NKJV)

⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Romans 12:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

Psalm 92:12-14 (NKJV)

¹² The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. ¹³ Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God. ¹⁴ They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing...

A couple of observations from what the Psalmist said—

- ❖ First of all, you will not flourish in the Christian life *outside* of the “house of the LORD” (the local church)—you must be ‘plugged in’.
- ❖ Secondly, too many Christians are no longer bearing fruit in their old age because they have ‘retired.’

In other words, they have come to a place where they imagine that they have ‘*done their share of service*’, they have ‘*put in their time*’—so now it’s someone else’s turn to take over and carry on the work.

But folks, that is a dangerous and often destructive mindset which plays right into the devil’s hand—and if you don’t think so look at what happened to David when he ‘retired’ from serving the Lord! (2 Samuel 11)

I. The True Vine-Jesus

II. The Vinedresser-The Father

III. The Vine Branches

A. Judas Branches—The ‘Professors’

John 15:2, 6 (NKJV)

² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

This is the *controversial* part of this passage—who are these branches that don’t bear fruit and are cast out and burned?

These words have been interpreted in three main ways:

1. *The “burned” branches are Christians who have lost their salvation.* (But this contradicts many passages, e.g., John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 10:28-29; Romans 8:1.)
2. *The “burned” branches represent Christians who will lose rewards but not salvation at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:15).* (But Jesus spoke here of dead branches; such a branch is thrown away and withers.)
3. *The “burned” branches refer to professing Christians who, like Judas, are not genuinely saved and therefore will eventually be judged and sent to hell (“burned”).*

I personally hold to the last interpretation of the three—I believe that the branches that don’t bear fruit are a reference to Judas and all who are like him.

In other words—phony or counterfeit disciples, people who look genuine but are only superficially connected to Jesus—like Judas, that’s why some have called these ‘**Judas branches**.’—verses 2a, 6

These are ‘*professors*’ but not *possessors*—even as Paul said to Titus, “*They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him.*” (Titus 1:6)

Jesus gives us three things that characterize these branches (people).

1. They Don’t Bear Fruit—verse 2

John 15:2 (NKJV)

² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...

Every genuine Christian produces fruit—with some Christians you may have to look hard to find a couple of shriveled grapes—but they’re there.

Matthew 7:16-17, 20 (NKJV)

¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit... ²⁰ Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Matthew 3:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance."

Romans 6:20-21 (NKJV)

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

Unbelievers can't bear spiritual fruit no matter how religious they are because they have no spiritual life flowing through them. They have no spiritual life in them because they are not connected to Jesus by faith.

Even Judas who walked with Jesus and was *close* to Him didn’t bear any spiritual fruit because he wasn’t really connected to Jesus by saving faith. (John 6:70-71; 10:10-11)

- Being in close *proximity* to Jesus doesn’t matter (a person who gets ‘close’ to Jesus by going to church)—there must be a living, vital connection through saving faith!

A branch can be half an inch from the vine but unless it’s *connected* it will never produce fruit. (Relate to religious unbelievers)

Phony Christians can fake fruit, they can pretend to bear fruit—and to the undiscerning it looks like the real thing but they’re “fruit” doesn’t last, it doesn’t remain (verse 16)—because they themselves don’t remain.

REFLECTION: Why can't unbelievers bear spiritual fruit?

Which brings us to the next point under the “Judas Branches” section in this study—

2. They Don't Abide—verse 6a**John 15:6 (NKJV)**

⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered...

The key concept that this entire passage revolves around is that of ‘**abiding in the Vine**’—i.e., abiding in Jesus Christ.

We’re going to talk about ‘*abiding*’ in detail next time as we turn the focus of this study from “**Judas Branches**” to “**Jesus Branches**”—or in other words, to the branches that are truly connected to the Vine (i.e., genuine believers in Christ).

But for now, let me just say that the word ‘**abide**’ comes from a Greek word that means to “*remain*” to “*continue*” or to “*stay around*.”

Those that are really saved—stay around—they remain! In other words, they “*continue*” in the faith and in their walk with Jesus.

In John 15, Jesus used the concept of abiding, not as a condition for *attaining* or *maintaining* salvation—but as the evidence that a person has truly accepted Him as their Lord and Savior.

Now I realize that true believers can backslide once in a while—but that’s not what we’re talking about here.

It’s important that you understand that abiding doesn’t *make* you a true disciple of Christ—it just *proves* that you are one. Many phony, so-called disciples of Jesus, when He laid out the cost of true discipleship—walked away and followed Him no more.

John 6:68-69 (NKJV)

⁶⁸ But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

1 John 2:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

The evidence of salvation is continuing in your relationship with and service for Jesus—which of course also includes continuing to follow His teaching by walking in His truth everyday:

John 8:31 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide [continue/remain] in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

1 John 2:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

REFLECTION: What does it mean to abide?

Continuing in the faith isn't a condition for maintaining salvation—it's the evidence of true saving faith in a person's heart. When Jesus said—

John 15:6 (NKJV)

⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out...and...burned.

He was not talking about salvation conditioned upon our faithfulness to abide—He was referring to superficial 'Judas branches' who eventually show their true colors and depart from the faith. At this point someone will object and say, "But Jesus said, 'Every branch *in Me* that does not bear fruit He takes away...' (verse 2)—doesn't that prove He was talking about true Christians?"

Don't let the phrase "*in Me*" bother or throw you—I don't believe Jesus is speaking *literally* but in a *figurative* sense. In other words, they *appear* to be in Him ('*in Me*')—just like Judas *appeared* to be "*in Christ*" and genuine in his faith.

Luke 8:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

Romans 11:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

You see it's possible in an analogy to be '*connected*' to something and yet not be *actually* and *vitally* connected—or in other words, not be the real thing. When Jesus said, '*every branch in Me*', He wasn't speaking in a strict theological sense as when Paul the apostle talked about a believer being '*in Christ*'—He was simply using an analogy. You can't push an analogy or parable to the 'Nth' degree—because it will start to break down.

Jesus often prefaced a parable with the words, "*The Kingdom of heaven is like...*"—not "exactly like" but "kinda like."

REFLECTION: What type of evidence would support true salvation?

The '*in Me*' in John 15 is only an apparent connection not a real one—how do I know Jesus has counterfeit believers or phony Christians in view here and not real ones?— Onto our next point:

3. They Are Destroyed—verse 6b

John 15:6 (NKJV)

⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

a. **'Cast Out'**

Jesus said that the person who doesn't abide in Him is cast out and burned (sent to hell). This can't be talking about true Christians because Jesus said in John 6 concerning those who truly come to Him with saving faith—

John 6:37 (NKJV)

³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

b. **'Withered'**

Matthew 13:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

Matthew 13:20-21 (NKJV)

²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

c. **'burned'**

Matthew 13:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

REFLECTION: When thinking about *phony* or *counterfeit* disciples, also known as "Judas Branches"—give some examples of what makes someone a Judas Branch.

Matthew 13:40-42, 49-50 (NKJV)

⁴⁰ Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out

demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Jesus is here giving all "Judas Branches" a solemn warning— "*Make sure you're not deceiving yourself. Are you really saved? Are you really born-again? Are you really a member of God's Kingdom?*"

The church is flooded today with "counterfeit Christians"—people who have gone to church, a Christian concert or a crusade, heard the gospel went forward when the altar call was given and prayed a prayer to receive Jesus—and yet didn't realize what was involved in making this decision and therefore didn't really turn their lives over to Him as Savior and Master.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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