

John 15:1-6 Union with Christ as the Basis for All Good Works (This is a new version of a previous sermon.)

There is nothing more important in the universe than union with Christ. Though mysterious, for the Christian, practically, it is the most beautiful doctrine in all the Bible. As Adam and Eve lost their spiritual union with God in the fall, in Christ this union is restored. All of the OT points to this truth. So today, I want to remind us of this union with a particular attention to the fact that our being joined to Christ is the basis for all good works.

Our fruits depend upon our union with Christ. Although this comes out through the entire passage, I get this mainly from v. 5. Jesus said, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”** (Certainly, the opposite of this is not bearing fruit and being thrown out.) Let’s recall the context a little further. These words were spoken the night before Jesus died. They include at least John 14-17, and are some of the most important, clear teaching in the life of Jesus. I believe Jesus saved these words until right at the end of his time on earth. After the last supper, at some point Jesus and his disciples headed to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus knew immediately what was coming. And, he knew what was coming in their lives. And, he looked forward to us (all believers) as well, as he pictured a vine and its branches, to teach something essential to our life.

When Jesus spoke of a vine, I believe the disciples, who were Jewish men, would have recalled that many times in the OT, Israel was referred to as a vine. There are many examples. I will read one from Ps. 80:8-11: **“You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. ⁹ You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. ¹¹ It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? ¹³ The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. ¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, ¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself. ¹⁶ They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!”** You see, Israel was the “*vine*” of God. But, in every case we read about this vine in the OT, we see that the “*vine*” was fruitless. They constantly disobeyed and did not produce fruit. Now, all of a sudden in John 15, Jesus says, “*I am the vine.*” In contrast to Israel, Jesus bore good fruit. Jesus is the real vine to which Israel pictured.

We see this as well with all the other OT realities. As the people looked to Moses as their prophet, Moses said, “*There is one coming after me. To him you must listen.*” As the law came through Moses, so grace and truth came through Christ. Jesus replaced the Temple as the place where God meets his people. All the OT feasts that pointed to the blessings of the Messiah were fulfilled in Christ. Now, Jesus says that, I am the real vine, replacing Israel as God’s vine. As the “*vine*” of Israel failed to produce fruit, now fruit is dependent on Christ, who is the vine.

I have 4 applications of this truth:

1. The source and means of fruit for the Christian is Christ. I don't think I can go a year without an illustration from my garden. So far this has been a good year for beans. And with the little bit of rain last night, it looks like I will have more beans coming. I planted bush beans. But, for some reason, about every 10 feet, there is a half-runner. Instead of a bush, it is more like a vine that spreads out. And when I pick my bush beans, everything stays in tact. But, with the half-runners that spread throughout the surrounding beans, it is so easy to pull away the branches that connect to the vine. And when I do, they wither and die, and do not produce any more beans. The secret of the branch's life, strength, vigor, beauty, and fertility is its connectivity with the vine. Separate from the vine, there is no life. There will be no fruit. The sap and juice that flow into the branches is vital to life. If we cut a branch from the vine, it must wither and die. In the same way, as Christians, our fruit is dependent on our union with Christ.

Jesus says "apart from me you can do nothing!" Jesus is the mediator between God and man. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through him. There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved than the name of Jesus Christ. He came to give us life. As Adam and his kin (all of us) were cut from their source of life, Christ came to give us LIFE. In John 17:22-23 Jesus says, "**The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.**" This is what it means to be a part of the vine, to be united with Christ and seated in the heavenly places. And if there is no union, there is no fruit! You will know if a person is united to Christ by his fruit.

2. There is no REAL fruit apart from Christ. Remember the context in which Jesus taught. All the disciples knew practically about religion was found in the teachings and examples of the religious leaders of that day. Their "*fruit*" was dependent upon the old covenant with all its regulations and principles. There was law upon law, tradition upon tradition, work upon work. Their fruits were dead because they were not grounded and connected with the Messiah. Their fruits were not acceptable to the Father because they were not grounded in principles of righteousness. And the very Messiah to which the Old Covenant pointed was now in their midst saying, "**Apart from me you can do nothing**" (John 14:6). In that context Jesus was saying, "*Their fruits are not acceptable because they are not grounded in me.*"

The reason God looks down upon the good works of Christians is because He sees them "IN CHRIST." Brothers and Sisters, the good news of the Gospel is that Christ has taken our sins upon himself. And in return, he gives us his righteousness. A non-Christian may look at his good works and think God will accept him. But, this will never happen apart from faith in Christ. Every day, when I consider my works, I think how pitiful they are. I see how I have failed God. I see how I have sinned against him. I look at my heart and know my sins. I am the broken reed or the smoldering flax that is about to burn out. But, when God looks down upon me, He sees the person and work of his Son, and he sees the righteousness of the Son. Yes, there are consequences for sin in this world, but my position is in Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ. This is the Gospel!

3. Though many appear to be Christians, they are not united with Christ. In this parable we see branches that bear fruit and branches that do not bear fruit. There are “*branches in the vine*” which appear to be joined to the parent stem, and yet bear no fruit. In the same way there are men and women who appear to be members of Christ, and yet will prove finally to have had no vital union with Him. As with Israel in the OT, all were circumcised physically. But, as Paul says, “*They were not circumcised in their hearts.*” When you looked at them as a whole, you could not tell the difference (Consider the weeds growing beside my green beans. Abby often can’t tell the difference.). Today, many people are “*joined*” to Christ in baptism and church membership. But, they lack the most important thing. They have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ, and Christ with them. In name, they are Christians, but in the sight of God, they are dead.

One of the most dreadful verses in all the Scriptures is found in Matt. 7:21-23: Jesus said, “**Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** ²² **On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?** ²³ **And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'**” And notice what happens to these people. Look at v. 2: “**Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away. . .**” Now look at v. 6: “**If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**”

BEWARE that your works are not apart from Christ. Are you trusting Him? Today, are you looking to Him? Are you believing in Him? Does your soul find peace in knowing your sins are forgiven? If not, trust Him today! Jesus died on the cross. His blood flowed from his body to the point of death. God accepted the sacrifice of his Son on the cross. And, he rose again and sits at the right hand of the Father. And, now he gives his people the gift of the Holy Spirit and the fruits that follow are not based upon our good works, but upon Him who has worked in us and is working in us to produce fruit.

4. Abiding in Jesus is the proof of our fruits. Seven times in the first 10 verses we see the word “abide.” It simply means remain. So from one perspective, we see that if we “*abide*” or “*remain*” in Jesus, we will bear fruit. But, from another perspective, I would say that our “abiding” in Jesus is in some way the proof of our fruits. In other words, “*He who endures until the end will be saved.*” There are many who would take this passage on the vine and the branches to say that a person can fall away from the faith. But, that is not what this passage is teaching. John the Apostle, as he spoke of those who left the faith, said “**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 it might become plain that they all are not of us**” (1 John 2:19). I am willing to argue that “*abiding*” itself is a fruit of the Spirit. So, what does an abiding person look like?

An abiding person is one that sticks to Christ. It is like chapstick on your lips. The person who abides in Christ loves him, and this love is greater than any other love. This person says with the Apostle Peter, when asked if he will leave Christ: “*Where else can I go? You have the words of eternal life,*” and “*Though everyone else leaves you, I will not.*” (Think of Peter. He abandoned Christ in the Garden, but followed Jesus to his trial. He denied Christ three times, but had great remorse and repentance in his heart. This is an example of a man who looked at his works and asked, “Am I real?” In the end, it was a repentant heart that looked to Christ. This is what it means to abide.)

There are lots of other fruits that flow from the abiding Christian. John says that those who “abide” in Christ love God’s people. They love his word. They hate the world. They are obedient. As we examine the fruits of our life today, we must ask ourselves these things.

I believe that a person who “abides” is a person who is always living a life of repentance and faith in Christ. We sin and we realize our sin, and we ask God to forgive us, and we remember the cross and resurrection of our Lord. The person who abides continues to grow in godliness, and this is noticeable. In other words, there is growth throughout the life of the abiding Christian. I would like to close today with the words of Peter in 1 Peter 1:3-8: “**His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Oh, how we need Christ! All fruit, all LIFE is dependent upon our union with Him. Look unto Him today, this week.