

Metaphors of Christ #9: Christ as the True Vine

Direct observations from Jn. 15:1-8:

- Christ is the vine, the Father is the husbandman, we are the branches - 15:1, 5
- The Father cuts off branches that do not bear fruit - 15:2
- He prunes those that do bear fruit - 15:2
- To bear fruit, we must abide in him, and he must abide in us (like vine and branch) – 15:4
- If we abide in him, we will bear much fruit – 15:5
- Without Christ, we can do nothing (of true worth) – 15:4, 5
- Those who do not abide in Christ are cut off; they wither, and are burned – 15:6
- If we abide in him and his words abide in us, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done – 15:7
- When we bear bear much fruit, it glorifies God – 15:8
- To bear fruit is an evidence that we are his disciples – 15:8

Our relationship to Christ being compared to branches on a vine.

1. That relationship is called “abiding”, where we are so closely related to him that his life flows to us.
What does it mean to abide? *To dwell in or to live, to remain in.* Jesus told his disciples to “abide” in a house when they were ministering, until they left a city. In fact, we even call a home an “abode” – it is where we live. We live “in Christ”, and he lives “in us”. It can also mean *to be steadfast or remain faithful to.* e.g. “I will abide by what I said.” A green branch can abide a lot of storm and wind and still remain on the tree, but a dead branch is more likely to break or fall off.
2. The Father’s purpose is for us to bear “much fruit” so that he will be glorified.
God doesn’t intend merely to “get you to heaven” – he wants you to bear fruit now, in this life, for his glory.
3. The Father performs two kinds of cutting
 - a. He removes the dead branches and fruitless ones
 - b. He prunes the ones that do bear fruit
4. The only way we can bear fruit is to abide in him, and to allow his life to abide in us, because without him we cannot bear fruit (or it is evil fruit).
The fact that we cannot bear fruit on our own, is what causes God to be glorified. It is a witness to the church, the world, and the forces of darkness that God is in us, of a truth.
5. When we truly abide in him, and are bearing fruit, we are assured that we are his, and can expect answers to our prayers.

How do we receive ongoing life from God? From Christ as the Word of God, and as the True Light. A branch receives life in two ways – by sap, and by sunlight. The sap flows out to the branches to bring them life. They in turn return strength and growth to the vine through photosynthesis in the leaves. We read the Word (Bible), and Christ the Living Word lives in us, and we receive the light of Christ as ministered by the Holy Spirit. So, our Vine/branch relationship with Christ involves knowing him both as the **Word**, and as the **Light of the world** (the metaphors we studied in Jn. 1).

On a different note, we need to think about what kind of food we are eating. We should not be “health nuts”, but it is indisputable that our health depends very much on what kind of food we eat. If we try to live on junk food, we can expect sickness and early death. The same goes spiritually. What kind of “bread” are you taking in? If you fill your mind with rubbish and filth and vanity, you can’t expect spiritual health and blessing, nor that good and abundant fruit that glorifies God.

What do you read? What do you click on? What do you think about? Are you a weed, or a part of the Vine? Does your life produce anything of value to God and those around you, or are you living solely for self?

As you recall, we talked about Christ being the Bread of God come down from heaven in Jn. 6, and a part of that was where he said we must eat his flesh and drink his blood, or we have no life in us. At that time I said we would cover that more, when we got to Jn. 15 where he is the Vine and we are the branches.

What does blood do, in a physiological sense? It can carry oxygen and digested food molecules to the parts of the body where needed, it carries waste products from the body parts to where they can be removed, and it brings white blood cell “commandos” to fight against infections and foreign substances.

One of the most amazing things in creation is the process of digestion and assimilation of food. Living creatures have the God-given capability of ingesting dead matter, and using it to develop new, living flesh. So spiritually, we can take in the dead letter of a written Bible, and God through Christ and the Holy Spirit so work on it that it becomes a living part of us.

So here are some very practical comparisons:

1. To **read the Word** is like eating food – it is good, but it is only the first step. It is the way we get physical food into our bodies in reasonably small pieces.
2. To **meditate on it** is like digestion, like “chewing the cud”. The digestive process chemically breaks food down into small units that are useable in the body. Spiritually, it breaks the Word down from just words on a page or in memory, to something we can apply to our daily lives.
Another analogy would be parting out a junk car. The car once had its own functioning existence but is now “dead”. Nobody can use a dead vehicle, but a junk yard can break it down into useable parts which can then be used elsewhere.
3. To **pray the Word** is like the circulation that brings food molecules to body’s cells
4. To **obey the Word** is like the assimilation of food molecules to become an actual part of our living cells. Obedience is what takes the dead letter and makes it a living part of our being.

As an interesting sidenote to this Vine/branches analogy is what we see in Rom. 11:16-24. Gentile Christians are not to boast themselves against the Jews, as if God has cast them off forever. They were broken off through unbelief, and we Gentiles, who were branches of “a wild olive tree”, were grafted (grafted) in to the good olive tree. If we do not continue in his goodness, we also can be broken off. Furthermore, God is able to graft the Jews back in to their own olive tree. There will eventually come a day when the Jewish people will be restored and believe in Christ (not every single individual, but the representative whole).