

## John 15 (5) – I'm the Vine You're the Branch

Let's read John 15:1-6. I want to talk about two ditches, one on each side of an important path. The path is the narrow road of salvation. And one ditch has people fretting over the fruit in their lives, and thinking maybe they aren't saved. The other ditch has people who don't really care about the fruit in their lives, and they just presume they're saved.

So, here is the thing; some people worry too much about good works, and others don't worry enough. And today's message will speak to both.

Of course, one side isn't really a ditch; these people are actually on the path of salvation, but they don't enjoy it, because they looking at the wrong thing. And the other side isn't really a ditch either: it is a pit, and these people are blind to their condition because they are deaf to the warnings of Scripture.

So, I want to show you how God uses all of your life to produce fruit in your life. And I want to give you encouragement and hope regarding your role in all of this, and why God will reward your less than perfect obedience.

I also want to show you how God warns people who might think they can't be obedient. And others who think that what they do doesn't matter.

In this way God can use his word to open the eyes, minds, and hearts of those who are deceived. And for those who are truly connected to God, this word can set you free from the fretting and frustration of feeling like you're not as good as you should be, and thinking you should be punished.

It's time to be enlightened, exhorted, encouraged, and set free. Amen.

Romans 8:28 says – *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* God has called people to love him, and for those who do, all things work together for their good and God's glory. This is his purpose. But what does that look like?

Romans 8:29 says – *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* This defines what that purpose is, what it looks like in the life of a believer. All things work together to make you more like Jesus. That’s what God’s good purpose for you is.

Ok, so all things are working together to make you more like Jesus. But how does this “working together” work?

This is where concatenation comes into play. It’s a big word with big importance for your life. People who don’t even know this word still believe in this concept. Even people who aren’t Christians talk about this concept all the time. But for the Christian, it describes Romans 8:28, John 15, and much of what the New Testament pictures as your growth in God’s grace.

Concatenation refers to a chain or series of interconnected things or events. It’s like when Romans 8:28 says all things work together. It’s God’s providence, which is the exercise of his power to accomplish his purpose. For the Christian, circumstances, situations, events, people, and other things that may seem separate are actually interconnected. And they are all part of a design that is woven together into a fabric, and working together towards a particular aim. That aim is the character of Jesus.

Concatenation describes how God works everything in your life towards your sanctification. And understanding concatenation will give you a new perspective on growth. And that brings you to our text, John 15.

John 15 is a passage that brings up one of the great struggles of how Christians are to see the Scriptures and renew their minds. You read how Jesus speaks of the vine and the branches, and it is meant to fill you with hope and encouragement. But it may fill you with frustration and sorrow. If the fruit mentioned in John 15 represents the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), you might think that the fruit on your branch isn’t all that good, and some of it seems pretty rotten. It might make take you on a guilt trip.

What we are going to do is to look closer, and build your faith in God's work in your life. Here comes your encouragement. Straight from the Bible.

In John 15, Jesus is referring to a grapevine. On a grapevine, the vine goes vertically with roots that go down into the soil. Those roots carry what the plant needs to be nourished. The branch of the vine is connected on top, and is generally going horizontally on a wire or fence. The fruit of the vine, which is the cluster of grapes, appears at the end of the branch.

Now, when you think about Jesus as the vine and you as the branch, you might focus on the wrong thing. Because you might think that you have to work on your fruit, and so, you feel discouraged if you feel like your fruit is lacking. And no wonder. However, when you see it that way, you're not looking at John 15 correctly. Because the main thing about grapes growing is getting enough light.

And that is the main point that Jesus was making in this passage. He was telling the disciples, and those that came after the disciples, that his word, the Gospel message, had made them clean (vs.3). They were now true branches of God that could bear fruit (vs.4). And if they remained in an actively loving relationship with Jesus, instead of being complacent, they would indeed bear much fruit (vs.5).

The primary purpose of the branch is connection to the vine. That is how fruit is produced. As connection with the vine strengthens, the fruit will grow. The only fruit problem is when there is a disruption in the branch's connection to the vine (vs.6). If there is some sort of separation, there will be some sort of fruit issue. Fruit problems are connection problems.

And here is an encouraging application of this truth – You don't work on your fruit; you work on your connection. You work on your connection to the Vine through time with God's word, God's people, and prayer. God uses the means of grace to grow your grapes. Stronger connections to the Vine lead to more abundant fruit. And that fruit is being produced through all of

the circumstances, situations, events, people, and other things that happen in your life. You are connected to God's concatenation. Amen.

And here is another marvelous and hopeful thing to know how you grow. The growth is about the whole cluster of grapes. They grow together. When the fruit of the Spirit grows, it grows in unison. If you want a better grape of peace, or faithfulness, it comes as you strengthen your connection to the Vine. And when that grape grows, the rest of the bunch, representing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, will also grow. They will all grow to give God glory. As you strengthen your connection to the Vine, you will get an abundant harvest.

Now, let's look at another, related aspect of how God works in your life. Or isn't working in your life. What being connected to the Vine does and is. And what not being connected the Vine actually looks like.

When you think about fruit, you probably won't just think about the fruit of the Spirit, in other words, your character traits. You'll probably also think about obedience, and good works. And there's an important distinction you need to make in thinking about your good works or your obedience. And it is this: your good works can be truly good even though they're not perfectly good. They're never without some imperfections. They're always mixed with some kind of selfishness. But they are still good, and they still please God, and they will still be rewarded by God. Praise his name.

So, there's always the presence of indwelling sin. You are imperfect, and your good works are imperfect, yet you can be truly obedient. The Apostle Paul praises the churches for their obedience. In the Great Commission, Jesus, said "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." And he didn't add, "Well, of course, you can't really be obedient."

Even though you'll always have to deal with temptations, and you'll never have perfect motives, you can live a life that consists of ordinary faithful obedience. When you take verses like Isaiah 64:6 (*all our righteous deeds are*

*like a polluted garment*), and Jeremiah 17:9 (*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick*), and you turn it into the idea that you can't really obey, that everything in your life is just polluted, and deceitful, you have a problem. You aren't understanding those verses and others like them like you should. And it gives comfort and cover to those imposters who say they are believers but they aren't actually connected to the Vine.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, and Revelation 21:8 list certain types of sins, and say that people who live like this don't inherit the kingdom of heaven. These lists mark out unrepentant sinners whose lifestyle proves they don't know Jesus as their Savior and Lord. But if you are trained to think that you can't really be obedient, and that everything you do is nothing but sinful, then it takes the force out of these warnings. It makes grace a license to sin. Instead of a license to fight sin.

If you think, well, no one really obeys, then you don't feel the heat that these scriptures are intended to bring. People like this think it doesn't really matter if they bear no fruit. But Jesus says otherwise; it proves there is no vital connection to the Vine (vs.6).

1 John 2:6 says – *whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked*. And the NT contrasts people who are connected to the Vine with those who aren't. Some claim to be Christians but there is no fruit. And others are living a faithful, obedient life. They fight against sin. But the unconnected are so given over to their sins that they don't even struggle.

If you don't think obedience or good works is a real possibility, you might think that admitting it is humility. But it's a dangerous deception that leads to destruction. It leads to spiritual deafness, and a lack of concern when your life is marked by defiant disobedience – and that's the pathway to perdition.

God's love for you isn't affected by your actions. But your experience of God's love for you is affected by your actions. Can you improve your union with God? No. Can you improve your communion with God? Yes. The

Apostle Paul describes it like this in Philippians 3:12 – *I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* Dear branches, cling to the Vine.

Your union with God cements your status as a child of God. It doesn't change. But your experience and enjoyment of God is affected by your level of communion with God.

For example, as a child of God, in union with God, you have the right to come to God in prayer. And you have no greater right to come to God in prayer just because you've been obedient. But you are more likely to pray in the will of God when you are already walking in the will of God. Your obedience doesn't earn you a better answer. But your obedience may mean that you are better tuned in to God's frequency.

The metaphor of the vine and branches describes your union with God through Jesus Christ. You didn't create this relationship, and you can't break it. You are secure in God's grace. But what you do or don't do has an effect on your experience and enjoyment of God. John 14:21 makes it clear that love-motivated obedience does result in greater understandings and experiences of God's love. This is not a change in God's love for you, but a change in your experience of God's love for you.

A repentant lifestyle isn't about anxiously having to find every little thing you're doing wrong every day. Repentance isn't about making yourself miserable; it is about giving yourself to God! And confessing when you haven't been giving yourself to God. Asking for mercy. Asking for grace. Living the truth. A truly repentant life is a life that is truly rejoicing and resting in Jesus. Hallelujah!

The problem isn't your sin. The problem is when you say it isn't sin. And the problem isn't when you struggle with sin. The problem is when you don't or won't. That's when you are a liar. The kind of liar that Revelation 21:8 is talking about. The kind that won't go to heaven. Instead, see the light, feel the heat, and praise the Lord!