

Series: Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

Sermon Text: John: 15:1-11

Key Word: Abide

Big Idea: True Disciples Abide in Christ and Bear Fruit

Introduction

Like any scripture, context is critical to correct interpretation

- We study scripture to understand it, but to understand it correctly, we need context. Never try to understand a passage outside of its context. Scripture is meant to teach us something. A verse may have 1000 applications, but it has one meaning. Our task is to study it to show ourselves approved, handling accurately the word of truth, i.e., to figure out the right meaning.
- The most important rule we can follow to get the proper understanding of scripture is this "Never read a Bible verse." Never read A Bible verse. Read a bunch of them. If you're trying to understand what a verse means, read the ones that come before and the ones that come after. If you try to understand a verse out of its context, you could very easily get the wrong meaning.

The Context

- It's been a month since we left off at the end of John chapter 14, so let's reacquaint ourselves with the context. By the way, that's why we didn't read the passage beforehand like we do sometime. I want us to understand the context before we dive in.
- This section starts in Chapter 13. It is the night before Jesus's trial and execution. They just had what we call the last supper. Jesus washed their feet. There was some intense, meaningful conversation and teaching in this time during his final hours. It was really GOOD stuff. All except for one part, that wasn't good. In fact, it was awful. What was it? **Judas!** His imminent treachery was revealed.

Judas!

- We all know from history who Judas was, but this was all news to the disciples. Jesus knew all along that Judas was betray Him, but none of the other disciples suspected anything! Jesus was on his way to the cross, which from their view was bad enough, but on top of that this bombshell was laid on them. Put yourself in their sandals and imagine how you would take it. Their minds had to be reeling! Not only was there a traitor, but the traitor was in their midst. The traitor was one of them! With no obvious difference from them.
- From all outward appearances, there was nothing manifestly obvious in the life and character and behavior of Judas that would have distinguished him as a false disciple. He was visibly attached to the group, and for all intents and purposes, looked like everybody else, did what everybody else did. In fact, Judas was so good at playing the part that when Jesus said "One of you is going to betray Me." They didn't point to Judas and say, "It must be you!" They had no idea who it was.

What this revealed was that there were two kinds of followers in that room

- There were those who were **genuinely connected** to Jesus, whose life would **bear fruit** and **there was one** who, although going through all the motions, was not genuinely connected to Jesus and therefore did not bear fruit.
- They have now left the upper room and are on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. And Jesus continues to teach as they are walking (time is short and Jesus is making the most of it) and He's going to help them process what just happened...
- **And He does it by talking about a vine, and branches, and abiding and fruit-bearing, which turns out is a beautiful picture of the nature of genuine salvation...of what it means to be a true Disciple of Christ...as opposed to a Judas-like disciple.**

Now we can read the passage: *"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 it so that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, proving to be My disciples. ⁹ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*

In this passage there are 4 main characters: There is Jesus the vine, the Father the Vinedresser, Unfruitful Branches and Fruitful Branches. Let's take a closer look at each of these.

Character #1: Jesus the Vine

I Am – Jesus focuses on His deity

- In this statement, Jesus is again emphasizing His deity, because the verb he uses is referring back to the OT name for God, Yahweh, which meant I AM or I AM that I AM... the eternally existent One; the everlasting being... "the always is, and always was, and always will be" One.
- Throughout the study of John's gospel, we've seen several of these "I AM" statements of Jesus when He was describing Himself [Bread of Life, Light of the World, the Door, the Good Shepherd to list a few]. This is last of the seven I AM statements that John records.
- So, Jesus begins here by reminding his followers that even though some very catastrophic, shocking, devastating (from their point of view) events are about to take place, and it's going to look like things have totally gone off the rails, Jesus wants them

to remember that **“I am God, and I’ve got this under control. I know what I’m doing. Don’t be afraid.”**

Jesus is the TRUE Vine

- The word True here had a very distinctive purpose. It’s the only time He used it in His “I AM” statements. He didn’t say He was the **True** bread of Life, or the **True** Light of the World, the **True** Good Shepherd...So, why now?
- What motivated him to point out He was the TRUE Vine? Because there was a false vine. A corrupted, fruitless, empty vine that the people were relying on. That vine was the nation of Israel. The Jewish nation. In the Old Testament (viz. Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) God calls Israel His vine, that He planted it in fertile soil, nurtured it, watered it, gave it everything it needed to bring forth grapes. But Israel was unfaithful, idolatrous, immoral, and instead of bearing grapes, it produced sour, useless inedible berries. As a result, God brought judgment upon the nation and disqualified it from being the vine.
- But so many of the Jews still thought that since they were a part of the nation they were still connected to God and were automatically blessed because of that association. Their thought was this: “I’m Jewish, I’m the seed of Abraham, therefore I’m connected to God.” Jesus here is saying “No, that is incorrect.” His point: **Being connected to Abraham was not enough.** If you want to get to God, to connect with God, to be made right with God, to be blessed by God, you **MUST** be connected to Jesus. Only through Christ does the life of God flow.
- Let’s apply this same principal to today. **Just being connected to the church is not enough.** Don’t miss this point. You can be church member and doing any number of churchy things without having a genuine connection to Jesus. In chapter 14, Jesus didn’t say “The **church** is the way the, the truth, the life, no one comes to the Father but by it” did He? Just like in chapter 14 Jesus is again stating emphatically that no one comes to the Father without having an attachment to Christ.

Jesus is the only legitimate path to God

- As you are aware, in today’s culture, there’s a lot of push back on the claim that Jesus is the only way of salvation. It is VERY politically incorrect to take this position. If you say that to someone “Jesus is the only way to God, no other religions will get you there,” you’re likely to get a response like, “That’s offensive! That’s arrogant, narrow-minded, intolerant, and hateful.”
- You might want to gently remind them that if that is their position, they are welcome to it. But inform them if they disagree with that claim, their beef is not with you, their beef is with Jesus. Because you are simply repeating His position.

After making it clear that He is the only genuine savior, He’s now going to tell us what genuine salvation looks like and explain the distinction between a genuine disciple and a false one.

Unfruitful Branches aka, False Branches or Judas Branches (Verses 2 & 6)

“2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”

Who are they?

- These are people, like Judas, that are **outwardly associated with Jesus but are not internally connected to Him**. And because they do not have that internal attachment, because their “heart” is not in it, they bear no fruit. Some biblical scholars refer to these as “Judas branches”.
- Judas from all outwards signs was part of the program, but inwardly never bought into it. And from his time up to today and until Christ returns, there will be people who associate with the church and are therefore outwardly associated with Christ, but are not genuine, born-again disciples. And while they never “sold out” Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, these branches are exactly like Judas in that they will never bear fruit because they have only an outward appearance of attachment. As a result, God will remove them.
- Remember at the end of the *Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew 7 Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And I will say to them on that day Depart from Me, I never know you.” He’s talking about these unfruitful, Judas branches.

What happens to them?

- Notice that when it comes to eternal judgment – their fate is the same as any hard-core atheist, any agnostic, any pagan, followers of false religions. Their judgment is the same as anyone who does put their faith in Christ alone to rescue them from the wrath of God. In other words, your church membership card does not get you into heaven, only abiding in Christ does.

Does this also refer to Christians that lose their fruitfulness and end up in hell as consequence? Does this passage teach that a Christian can lose their salvation?

- If you take these verses out of context, it can lead you to think He’s including Christians that lose their fruitfulness. And if a Christian loses their fruitfulness, they are cut off and burned. Some might think these Christians lose their salvation, and instead of Heaven, they receive eternal condemnation in Hell. **This is in no way what Jesus is teaching here.** Let’s look at 4 reasons why we can be confident that is NOT what Jesus is referring to here.
- **Reason #1 Immediate Context:** Based on the context that can’t be the meaning. If Jesus here is trying to help His disciples understand the difference between the kind of disciples they are (true) and the kind of disciple Judas was, Judas was not a Christian who lost his fruitfulness and therefore lost his salvation. He was a poser who was never a genuine disciple. He was never connected with Christ in the first place
- **Reason #2 Similar teachings:** This type of situation (i.e. unfruitful trees being cut down and thrown in the fire) has already addressed elsewhere by both Jesus and John the Baptist.

- **Pharisees:** John the Baptist in Matthew 3 is condemning the Pharisees who were coming to be baptized. John rightly recognizes them as hypocrites who looked good on the outside, but inside they were dead. He tells them that their being sons of Abraham will not save them. Instead, they needed to bring forth the fruit which is produced only through genuine repentance. John concludes with ***“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”***
- **False Prophets:** In Matthew, Jesus warns against false prophets, who are people who claimed to know God and claim to speak for Him, and while they look like us (sheep) on the outside, on the inside are wolves. How will we know them? By their fruit. Good trees produce good fruit. If a tree does not produce good fruit, then it is a bad tree. Jesus concludes with ***“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”***
- Since both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ have already made practically identical teachings and the branches cast in the fire (self-righteous Pharisees and false prophets) were CLEARLY not believers who had lost their fruitfulness, there is no reason to force that meaning on these verses.
- **Reason #3 – Contradicts clear biblical teaching:** Jesus already had clearly taught that a person redeemed by Christ was eternally secure. John recorded this in chapters 6 and 10, (and Jesus will talk about it again in this chapter and later John 17). John 6:37 ***“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.”*** Note that Jesus will not CAST OUT anyone who comes to Him. What happens to the unfruitful branches in our passage today? They get CAST OUT. So, Jesus is very obviously not talking about Christians. This is a great example of “Never read a Bible verse.” If we plucked v2 and v6 out of context and read them in isolation, one could be tempted to conclude these verses mean a Christian can lose his fruitfulness and thus lose his salvation. But if you read a bunch more verses, you realize you came to the wrong conclusion.
- **Reason #4 – Salvation is by faith, not works:** If making it to heaven depends on you bearing good fruit, that would make salvation a matter of works, not grace. And that is patently unbiblical.

Deconversions – No Such Thing

- One word about Deconversions. Lately there have been several high-profile Christians (e.g., authors, pastors, musicians, celebrities) who have abandoned their faith and gone public about it, done interviews about it, written about it. They will refer to it as “De-Converting.” The way they put it is that they embraced Christianity (they were converted) and then they walked away from Christianity (they de-converted.)
- **Please note this about deconversions – according to Jesus there is no such thing.** A genuine believer has an attachment to Christ, and they will never leave. If someone leaves Christ, they never had a genuine attachment in the first place. John makes that specific point in his first epistle, ***“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that***

it would be evident that they all are not of us.” I John 2:19. And by the way, that is why we follow Jesus. We don’t follow other Christians.

The Fruitful Branches

What are these branches? Every genuine follower of Christ. Every True Disciple.

- These are the ones who have made a genuine internal connection. Those who have responded to the Gospel with a humble heart and placed their trust in Christ for forgiveness and committed their lives to Him. **Every one of these branches is characterized by 2 things – They abide in Christ, and they bear fruit.**

As Christian’s we are called to bear fruit

- “Saved by faith, not by works” doesn’t mean we sit on our spiritual assets and coast till Jesus comes back. As Christians we are called to bear fruit. Eph 2:8-9, ***For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.***

WE ARE NOT SAVED BY GOOD WORKS BUT FOR GOOD WORKS.

- In Titus 2:14 it says, ***God redeemed and PRUNED (same Greek word) us to make a people zealous of good works.***
- In James chapter 2, faith without works is dead; and he says as the body without the Spirit is dead, so your faith without any evidence (fruit) is not true faith; it’s dead.
- In fact, 24 out of the 27 books in the New Testament, including all of Paul’s writings refer to Christians bearing fruit. It’s not so much that a true disciple SHOULD bear fruit, it’s that a true Disciple WILL bear fruit.
- **What about genuine followers of Christ who bear no fruit? No such thing.** If someone asks, “What happens to genuine followers of Christ who bear no fruit?” Trick question – there is No such thing.

There is no such thing as a “No-fruit Christian.”

- **HERE’S WHY.** When the life of God exists in the soul of person there must be fruit. When the spirit of God indwells a person, making him a new creature, there will be evidence! It can’t NOT be that way. There can be **NO** Christian who does not bear fruit. Granted there are Christians with a little fruit, Christians with some fruit, Christians with more fruit, Christians with much fruit. But **every** true disciple of Christ will bear fruit to some degree. In fact, according to Jesus, your fruit is a sign that you are a true disciple

Not a 24/7/365 thing, not perfection

- Let me be quick to point out, Jesus is not talking about perfection. I don’t think He’s expecting fruit 24/7/365. We all have our down times in our spiritual journey. Sometimes its 2 steps forward, 1 step back. Maybe even 2 steps forward, 3 steps back on occasion. We sputter, we get out on our own. Or we get distracted by some shiny object the world dangles in front of us. That’s a reality of the tension caused by being a new creation in Christ, yet still living in a physical body in a fallen world. But over time there will evidence (fruit) of a life being transformed at some level. Again, this fruit does not

gain your salvation. But it demonstrates to the world (and to you) that your salvation is real/genuine. It's not that you will never fall. You will. But when you fall, then get up and return to Christ. Like Peter did. The point is that bearing fruit as a disciple is not about PERFECTION, but about DIRECTION.

What is Fruit

- Short answer - Righteous attitudes, righteous longings, righteous desires, righteous affections, righteous behavior. But a helpful distinction to help us understand fruit is that there are Action Fruit and Attitude Fruit.
- **Action Fruit:** Action fruit is anytime we obey a command in scripture by doing something. Sharing the gospel, giving to the needy, praising God, taking care of widows and orphans, helping your neighbor, housing the homeless, doing chores for the sick and infirmed, feeding the hungry, etc. The list of possibilities is almost endless. That's action fruit. **But keep in mind that a good deed is only action fruit IF it is done with the right motive.**
- **Attitude Fruit:** In addition to action fruit, there is also attitude fruit, which is recorded in Galatians 5 - The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Those aren't acts, those are attitude. God's formula is this...you abide, that produces attitude fruit, and that then motivates action fruit. If you do "good deeds" without attitude fruit, that's not action fruit, that's legalism. You're out there cranking up the good works with the wrong attitudes. God rejects that. But if the Spirit of God produces right attitude fruit, right attitude fruit will produce right action fruit

What does it mean to abide?

⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire

- The Greek word translated abide means just that, remain, stay with, wait, to continue. Abiding means to have a constant, uninterrupted connection with Jesus.
- We can look at v. 4 as the gospel invitation in a nutshell. Jesus inviting you to abide in Him and He in you, and he will transform you into a fruit bearing branch. This perfectly describes our union with Christ. Also, v6 also gives the consequences of rejecting that gospel invitation.
- All Christians abide in Christ. It is a reality true of all Christians. Don't think that some Christians abide in Christ, and some don't. If you believe in Jesus, you are in Him. You are united to Him. That is a permanent, uninterrupted reality. I don't mind saying this can be a little hard to understand. If, as a believer we are abiding in Christ, and abiding is something that began in the past we when first believed, why are we commanded still to abide in him. But in addition, abiding is also an experience that we grow into by degrees. As we rest in Christ, trust in Christ, recognize the reality of our union with Him, abiding becomes an experience that we grow into by degrees. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you can experience the reality of this connection to Jesus more and more. To put in not very theologically concrete terms, when we are looking out over a congregation, all genuine disciples abide in Christ, but we recognize that some believers

seem to abide better and deeper than other believers. We can also recognize in we ourselves seem to abide better and deeper than at other times.

- Here is a comparable situation that might help us wrap our minds on what's being said. All believers have the Holy Spirit. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit the moment we surrender our heart and life to God. That is a fact of reality clearly taught in Scripture. But then we are also called to "walk by the Spirit and be "led by the Spirit" in our daily lives. So even though all believers have the Holy Spirit, some believers seem to walk better by the Spirit than other believers.

Blessings of abiding – the blessing to the believer of abiding in Christ are remarkable. Jesus mentions six in this passage.

- **We will produce much fruit. v. 4, 5:** We get to live a fruitful life. We will make meaningful, lasting contributions to the lives of others and internally bear the Fruit of the Spirit (see above). Who wouldn't want that?
- ***⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*** Conversely, if we don't abide in Christ we produce zero action fruit, zero attitude fruit. As Martin Luther pointed out, in this verse "nothing" does not mean a little something. And if you are not a believer, if you are apart from Christ, nothing you do matters, you will not produce any good fruit...at all. And that has disastrous lasting eternal consequences.

We will have a profound and meaningful prayer life v. 7

⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you

- Great! I've been praying to win the lottery and I haven't yet. So, if I follow this verse, I can ask, and it will happen?! Right? Not so fast. Notice the 2 conditions here...not only must you abide in Christ, but His words must abide in you." So, if you follow this verse and let His word abide in you (read, study, meditate, let it occupy up your mind and reform your thinking) something is going to happen...**your wish list is going to change.**
- So just as an example God's word says, "*The one who hurries to be rich will not go unpunished.*" Hurrying to get rich quick is an accurate description of the lottery. So, if God's word abides in you, I would doubt "God let me win the lottery" will be on your prayer list.

We will glorify God v. 8

8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, proving to be My disciples.

- When you bear fruit, you are doing what you were re-created to do. Just like we demonstrate our faith by our works (James) we demonstrate the genuineness of our commitment to Christ by bearing fruit. **And doing so brings glory to God**, and it shows that we are true branches, not Judas branched. We all want to live a life of significance. The world offers counterfeit ways for you to be significant, but it's a sham. It's not that the world over promises and under delivers. The world over promises and NEVER delivers. But here is a guaranteed way to live a life of significance, using your time on this earth to bring glory to God.

We will connect in a unique way with God's love v 9, 10

⁹ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

- If you ever find yourself questioning or doubting of the love Christ has for you, do 2 things. 1) **Meditate on THIS verse.** The love that the Father has for His Son is essentially unimaginable. It is bigger than anything we could wrap our minds around. Right? And here Jesus tells us that His love for us the same as the Father's love for Him. That's one thing to do. 2) The other is to roll the clock forward to the next day and **see Jesus hanging on the cross**, voluntarily enduring the shame and the agony of crucifixion because of the love He has for you.
- Jesus gives us a concrete way to abide in his love – what is that? Keep his commandments. If we're not careful, this may seem rather conditional. "Keep my commandments, I'll love you, conversely if you don't then I won't love you." Please notice that is **not** what He is saying at all. He already loves you whenever you do or whenever you don't keep His commandments. BUT if you keep his commandments, you will what? **ABIDE** in that love. Stay, reside in it, rest in the midst of it. As you live a life of obedience to Christ, you will be able to enjoy, to experience, to appreciate and reap the depths of that love wants to give you. If you live a life of lesser obedience, you move yourself away from the sweet spot of His love.
- Here is a helpful illustration to process what Jesus is saying. Think of the prodigal son. (see Luke 15:11-32). The father never stopped loving his son. He loved him before the son went to the far country, he loved the son while he was in the far country living in rebellion, and he loved him when he came back home. But notice that the only time the son was able to experience first-hand the abundance and richness of his father's love was when the son was abiding at home.

Christ's joy becomes our joy v 11

¹¹ These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

- The world loves to convince us that when it comes to deciding whether to live for Christ or do your own thing, if you want to be contented and fulfilled, you're better off doing your own thing because God's plan is to make you miserable and to never let you take pleasure in anything. You would get a perpetual lemon to suck the rest of your life. You'd live a boring, dull life, but when you die you get to go to heaven. For example, if you're a robust athlete, if you followed Christ, then God would break your legs and make you play the clarinet for a living. **NONSENSE!** Nothing could be further from the truth. Christ's motivation is to give us joy. And He will if we let Him. And that joy will be Light years beyond any joy you might experience on your own.
- By the way, if Jesus was the kind of God that wanted to put His thumb on you, grind you down and give you a cheerless, dismal life, do you really think He would wait until you gave Him permission to fulfill His goal for you?

Before we move on to our last character, let's not miss the forest for the trees. Even though we're repeatedly taught that Christianity is relational, oftentimes without realizing it we treat Christianity as transactional. For example, when I introduced the Big Idea – "True disciples abide in Christ and follow Him" if you thought to yourself "Okay! I'll add those two things to the checklist of things I gotta do for Jesus" then you're thinking transactional, not relational. The picture here is Christ being fruitful **through** you. His life, his energy, his presence, his abundance FLOWS through you, and that is what produces fruit. You are a conduit. Picture yourself walking through an apple orchard. The branches aren't grunting and straining to pop out fruit. If you listen closely, you're not going to hear the branch going, "Uuuuuugghhhh. Apples!" No, the branch just sits there constantly abiding in the tree trunk. And guess what? Apples grow. The fruit happens as a natural outflow of the branch being connected to the tree.

The Father – The Vinedresser

He has 2 functions here: We've already seen the first - Removing, gathering, and judging the false branches. **He does something different for the fruit bearing branches.** ²...

every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. ³ *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*

- The Father prunes the branches that bear fruit, **BUT** here are two different ways and two different reasons that the Father prunes us.
 - 1) **He initial prunes us so that that may become a fruit bearing branch.**
 - 2) **And then He continues to prune us to increase the fruit we bear.**
- To understand this, we need to look at the Greek words used here in v 2 and 3 for pruning and cleaning.
 - In v. 2 the Greek word for "prune" (what the Father does to increase fruitfulness) is "*kathaire*," which means to cleanse, to purify. We get our word English word "catharsis" from this; catharsis is a word which means to purify or to purge. When used in horticulture, it refers to cleaning off or cutting off unwanted growth for the good of the plant, cleaning up the plant to make it more productive. Because it's talking about work on branches, most Bible translations shows this as "He *prunes*..."
 - But right after that in v 3 Jesus says something very interesting. He makes the statement "You are already **"clean"** ...And in this He is using this **same word** He used in verse 2 which is translated Prune. Most Bible translations show this as **"clean"** (One is verb form (so prune/cleanse) the other is the adjective form (so pruned/clean). Personally, I think it would have been nice if the Bible translators had been consistent in the translation, using either "prunes" in verse 2 and "pruned" in verse 3, OR "cleanses" in verse 2 and "clean" in verse 3 so we wouldn't miss the connection. But they didn't ask me. 😊
- Here's what all this means:
 - The moment you submit your life to Christ, when you call upon the name of the Lord for your salvation God cleanses you, and in this sense, He cleanses you **ONCE AND FOR ALL**. Cleanses with a capital C (As the Psalmist says wash me,

and I will be whiter than snow). And through this cleansing you now are a branch permanently attached to Christ, you abide in the vine, and you become a fruit bearing branch.

- But after that He continues to cleanse you in a different sense for a different purpose. He cleanses/prunes you, not for purpose of salvation (that's taken care of) but for increased fruitfulness. God wants to remove things that hinder ability to bear much fruit.
- By the way, this parallels perfectly with what Jesus already told them when he was washing their feet in chapter 13. Remember? Peter didn't want to let Jesus wash his feet. Jesus said ***"If I do not wash you, you have no place with Me."*** So then of course Peter says, "Well, wash my hands and my head too." Jesus, said no, that's not necessary. Why? Because ***"The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean"*** (same Greek word here, *kathaire*). You can refer to our message on John 13:1-11 for further study, but Jesus was essentially saying "You are clean if you bathed. You've bathed, so you are already wholly clean. You just need a little dust knocked off your feet."
- **Now let's talk briefly about the pruning God does after he makes you into a fruit bearing branch.** First, if you're the plant and if you had feelings, I've got to think getting pruned is not very fun. I imagine it would be uncomfortable, it would hurt, sometimes hurt a lot if it was a big pruning. This brings to mind **Hebrews 12** where it talks about God disciplining His children, because that's what a real father does. *"He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems not to be pleasant, but painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."*
- It is well attested in scripture that God disciplines, matures, and perfects us by trials and tribulations, sufferings and difficulties. Consider James 1, ² *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,* ³ *knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* ⁴ *And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* I Peter 1:5-6, 5:10 talks about the same thing. These trials could be major events or crises (e.g., serious illness or physical disability, the loss of a job, the loss of a friend, the loss of a loved one, loss of material goods, the loss of reputation, slander, failure, persecution from strangers or from people you know and love). Or they can smaller persistent "aggravations" that attend our daily lives. Akin to the foxes in Song of Solomon 2:15 ***"Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that are ruining the vineyards, while our vineyards are in blossom."*** We all have little foxes running around trying to eat our fruit blossoms. But let's not miss this point: Even though the Father, in his providence, brings about these large and small trials and troubles, those things do not prune us, nor make us more fruitful. Those things are not God's pruning shears/knife!
- What does God use to prune/clean us? Verse 3 – the Word. **The trials are not the cleanser, God's word is the cleanser.** It is our obedience to God's word during the troubles that produces the increasing fruitfulness. The trials just open us, expose

ourselves so that the word can do its work in our lives. The Word, appropriately called a sharp two-edged sword then cuts away attitudes, affections, sins, stubbornness, selfishness that limit our fruitfulness.] If we choose not to apply God's word to trials and suffering, then trials and sufferings are just what? Trials and suffering. With zero benefit, zero growth. We get misery and grief with no redeeming aspect. And our suffering didn't produce anything except suffering. And that's a waste and that's a shame. But if we let the word of God inform and transform our thinking, and we meet those trials with a biblical mindset, that is when we can say, like Paul, did that these "momentary light afflictions are producing an eternal weight of glory (fruit) far beyond compare."

Let's apply this sermon:

- The words "prune" (15:2) and "clean" (15:3) are closely related. Verse 3 says the pruning agent is the Word of God, not trials. Why is this an important distinction? Would you share how God has used a trial to open you up and allow Scripture to prune you?
- "Abiding leads to attitude fruit, which leads to action fruit." Why is the order of this statement crucial? While good actions are commendable, in what sense do they fall short of glorifying God when done with the wrong attitude?
- All Christians will produce some measure of fruit over the course of their lives. Since fruitfulness depends on how we abide in or remain connected to Jesus, what activities might lead to more fruitfulness and what might lead to less fruitfulness?