

The Vine and the Branches

Lesson # 25 (Jn. 15; DA 674-677; SBC:1142-1144; ISM 336-339; SC 68-73; 5T 354-355)

In this lesson we will study the beautiful allegory of the vine and the branches. As we proceed, we shall find in this parable a richness which can never be exhausted and divine lessons which tax our human wisdom to the utmost.

It would be helpful to remember that in Israel, branches that do not bear fruit are cut off in February/March. “Sometimes the vines are so completely cut back that one sees in the vineyard only the stalks bereft of branches. Later (August) when the vine has put forth leaves, comes the second stage of pruning, as the vinedresser pinches off the little shoots so that the main fruit-bearing branches get all the nourishment.” (Raymond Brown, The Gospel According to John, volume 2, p. 675)

Let’s begin by examining the parable’s historical background, its occasion and its symbols.

Occasion and Place of the Parable

1. When and to whom did Jesus speak the parable of the vine and the branches? “And he [Jesus] said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My _____ is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy _____ with my disciples.” (Mt. 26:18)

Note: A careful comparison of John 13-17 with Matthew 26:18-45 reveals that they are chronologically parallel. The events described in these sources are taking place on Thursday evening and Jesus is speaking to His disciples. Both Matthew and John begin with the last supper in the Upper Room and end with the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. But John adds many details which are not found in Matthew. The foot washing (chapter 13), the discourse on the Holy Spirit (chapter 14), the parable of the vine and the branches (chapter 15), and further instruction on the Holy Spirit (chapter 16) are unique to John. The prayer of Jesus as described by Matthew covers only three verses (26:39, 42, 44) but in John it covers the whole of chapter 17.

2. To what destination were Jesus and His disciples traveling when He told this parable? “Jesus and the disciples were on the way to _____, at the foot of Mount _____, a retired spot which He had often visited for meditation and prayer.” (DA 674)

Note: Ellen White’s comment is corroborated by John 14:31 where, after the events in the Upper Room, Jesus told His disciples: “Arise, let us go hence.” Matthew 26:36 explains that they departed for the Garden of Gethsemane.

3. More specifically, where were Jesus and the disciples when He told the parable? “The moon is shining bright and _____ to Him a flourishing _____. Drawing attention of the disciples to it, He employs it as a _____.” (DA 674)

The Parable's Symbols

1. Why did Jesus choose the vine as an illustration instead of a tree? “Instead of choosing the graceful _____, the lofty _____, or the strong _____, Jesus takes the vine with its clinging _____ to represent Himself. The palm tree, the cedar, and the oak stand _____. They require no _____. But the vine entwines about the trellis, and thus climbs heavenward.” (DA 674)
2. What is represented by the husbandman, the vine and the branches? Jesus said: “I am the _____ and my Father is the _____. . . . I am the vine, ye [the disciples] are the _____.” (Jn. 15:1, 5)
3. What is represented by the fruit? “But the fruit of the Spirit is _____, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, _____, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no _____.” (Gal. 5:22-23)

Note: It is noteworthy how many times Jesus underlined the need to bear fruit. John the Baptist had said: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” (Mt. 3:9), Jesus said: “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Mt. 7:16; cf. Mt. 12:33). Toward the end of His ministry Jesus cursed the fruitless fig tree (Mt. 21:19) and denounced the husbandmen for not rendering God the fruit of the vineyard in its season (Mt. 21:33-47)

4. Why did Jesus emphasize that He is the **true** vine? “But Jesus says, I am the _____ Vine. Think not that through a connection with _____ you may become partakers of the _____ of God, and inheritors of the promise. Through Me _____ is spiritual life received.” (DA 675)

Note: In the Old Testament God had spoken of Israel as His vineyard. From this, Israel had developed the wrong impression that a connection with Israel was sufficient for salvation. But Jesus is saying that Israel is not the real vine, He is! In the same vein, Jesus said to the Jews: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the **true** bread from heaven” (Jn. 6:32). The noted commentator, Leon Morris, concurs with Ellen White: “As we have seen, the vine is often the symbol of Israel, and this adjective [*alethinos*] may point to Israel as the degenerate vine (Jer. 2:21) now replaced by the true.” (The Gospel According to John, p. 668-669)

The lesson for today is clear. A formal link with the Seventh-day Adventist church through church membership is worthless unless it is accompanied by a vital, personal and continuous connection with Jesus

The Vine is Planted

1. As a human being, from whence did Jesus derive His power? “So Christ in His _____ was dependent upon _____ power. ‘I can of Mine own _____ do nothing,’ He declared.” (DA 674-675)

2. Where did the Father plant Jesus? “On the hills of _____ our heavenly Father had planted this goodly Vine, and He _____ was the husbandman.” (DA 675)
3. How did the multitudes look upon this Vine? “Many were _____ by the beauty of this Vine, and declared its _____ origin.” (DA 675)
4. What did the Jewish leaders do with the Vine? “But to the leaders in Israel it appeared as a root out of _____ ground. They took the plant, and _____ it, and _____ it under their unholy feet. Their thought was to _____ it forever.” (DA 675)
5. What did the husbandman do with the bruised Vine? “But the heavenly Husbandman never lost _____ of His plant. After men thought they had _____ it, He took it, and _____ it on the other side of the _____.” (DA 675)
6. When the Husbandman replanted the Vine in heaven, could human beings still be grafted into it?

“The vine stock was to be no longer _____. It was hidden from the rude assaults of men. But the _____ of the Vine hung over the wall. They were to represent the _____. Through them _____ might still be united to the Vine. From them fruit has been obtained. There has been a harvest which the passers-by have plucked.” (DA 675)

Note: The meaning of all of this is clear: The Father planted Jesus in this world. Though many discerned His heavenly origin, the Jewish leaders trampled on Him and bruised Him. But the grave could not retain Jesus, and when He came forth, the Father transplanted Him to heaven. From there, the disciples who had already attached themselves to Jesus, preached the gospel of salvation to others. These others were then grafted into Jesus.

Abiding in the Vine

1. Who chose us to be grafted into the vine? “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and _____ you that you should _____ and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (Jn. 15:16)

Note: In the times of Jesus it was customary for students to seek out the most renowned rabbis as teachers. But the disciples did not choose Jesus, He chose them.

2. How is union with the Vine established? “The scion is _____ into the living vine, and _____ by fiber, vein by vein, it _____ into the vine stock. . . . So the soul _____ in trespasses and sins receives _____ through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as personal Saviour the union is formed.” (DA 675)
3. What happens when this union is established? “The sinner unties his weakness to Christ’s _____, his emptiness to Christ’s _____, his frailty to Christ’s enduring _____”

_____. Then he has the mind of Christ. The _____ of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched his _____.” (DA 675)

4. What must we do after we have been grafted into the Vine? “_____ in me and I in you.” “This union with Christ, once formed, must be _____. . . . This is no casual touch, no off-and-on connection. The branch becomes a part of the living vine. . . . Separated from the vine, the branch cannot _____. No more, said Jesus, can you live _____ from Me. The life you received from Me can be preserved only by _____ communion.” (Jn. 15:4; DA 676)

Note: The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary remarks: “Riding high on a wave of religious fervor one day, only to fall low into a period of neglect the next, does not promote spiritual growth.” (5BC 1042)

5. Which other synonyms help us understand what it means to abide in Christ? “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: _____ ye in my love. . . . Hereby know we that we _____ in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. . . . These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might _____ in you. . . .” (Jn. 15:9; I Jn. 4:13; Jn. 15:11)

Note: The words “continue”, “dwell” and “remain” are all the same Greek word that is translated “abide.” The emphasis of the Greek word *meno* falls upon a **habitual permanence** in Christ.

The Secret of Abiding

1. What is the secret to abiding in Christ? “If ye abide in me, and my _____ abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” (Jn. 15:7) “It is through the _____ that Christ abides in His followers.” (DA 677)
2. With which other metaphor did Jesus illustrate what it means to abide in Him? “He that eateth my _____ and drinketh my blood, _____ in me, and I in him. . . . It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The _____ that I speak unto you, they are _____, and they are life.” (Jn. 6:53, 63)

Note: It is by prayerfully studying and assimilating the Word of God that we abide in Jesus. The purpose of Bible study is not mere intellectual knowledge but rather to develop a deeply personal spiritual experience with Jesus.

3. What should be the purpose of Bible study? “And this is _____ eternal, that they might _____ thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. . . . But these are _____, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that _____ ye might have _____ through his name.” (Jn. 17:3; 20:31)

4. What counsel does Ellen White give concerning the method and purpose of Bible study? “The words of Christ must be _____ upon and cherished and _____ in the heart. They should not be repeated _____, finding no place in the memory and having no influence over the _____ and life.” (4T 355)
5. How did the John, the beloved disciple, learn to abide in Christ? “But as the character of the Divine One was manifested to him, he saw his own _____ and was humbled by the knowledge. . . . Day by day his heart was _____ out toward Christ, until he lost sight of _____ in the love for his Master. His resentful, ambitious temper was _____ to the molding power of Christ.” (Steps to Christ, p. 73)
6. How does the apostle Paul describe the results of a habitual contemplation of Jesus? “But we all, with open face _____ as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are _____ into the same _____ from glory to glory, even as by the _____ of the Lord.” (II Cor. 3:18)

Note: “By beholding Christ, by talking of Him, by beholding the loveliness of His character we become changed. Changed from glory to glory. And what is glory? Character,—and he becomes changed from character to character. Thus we see that there is a work of purification that goes on by beholding Jesus.” Sons and Daughters of God, p. 337.

5. How else did the apostle Paul describe his life of abiding trust in Christ? “ I am crucified _____ Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth _____ me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the _____ of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20)
6. Is abiding in Jesus always an easy endeavor? “We are to grow _____ in spiritual loveliness. We shall _____ often in our efforts to copy the pattern. We shall often have to bow down to _____ at the feet of Jesus, because of our shortcomings and mistakes; but we are not to be _____; we are to _____ more fervently, believe more _____, and try again with more steadfastness to grow into the likeness of our Lord.” (Selected Messages, Volume 1, p. 337)
1. What will Christ’s true followers do when they have ingrafted the Word? “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall _____ on me through their _____.” (Jn. 17:20)

The Evidence of Abiding in Him

1. What is the greatest evidence that we are abiding in Christ? He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much _____: for without me ye can do _____.” (Jn. 15:5). The fruit is identified as the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5.
2. Wherein is the Father glorified? “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear _____ fruit; so shall ye be my _____.” (Jn. 15:8)

3. Must we labor to bear fruit? “Yet the Saviour does not bid the disciples _____ to bear fruit. He tells them to _____ in Him.” (DA 677)

Note: In the same vein, Jesus does not tell his disciples to strive to shed light upon the world. He simply states, “**Let** your light shine” (Mt. 5:16). When we are truly linked with Jesus, fruit and light will spontaneously appear.

4. Does keeping Christ’s commandments bear any relationship to abiding in Him? “If ye keep my _____, ye shall abide in my _____, even as I have kept my Father’s commandments and _____ in his love. . . . Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I _____ you.” (Jn. 15:10, 14; see also, Jn. 14:14-16)

5. To which commandment was Jesus particularly referring? “This is my commandment, that ye _____ one another, as I have loved you.” (Jn. 15:12)

6. How did the apostle Paul define true love? “Owe no man any thing but to love one another, for he that _____ another hath fulfilled the law. For this, ‘thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not _____, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly _____ in this saying, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Rom. 13:8-9)

7. What other evidence indicates that we are abiding in the Vine? “These things have I spoken unto you, that my _____ might _____ in you, and that your joy might be _____.” (Jn. 15:11; for what Jesus meant by “joy”, study Jn. 14:28; 16:20-24; Heb. 12:2; Isa. 53: 11)

8. What lesson on unity did Jesus teach in the parable of the vine and the branches? “The branches of the vine cannot _____ into each other; they are _____ separate; yet every branch must be in _____ with every other if they are united in the same parent stock. . . . So every branch of the True Vine is _____ and distinct, yet all are _____ together in the parent stock. There can be no division.” (Ellen White, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, volume 5, p. 1143)

9. How did Jesus further amplify this lesson in His intercessory prayer of John 17? “That they all may be _____; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be _____ in us: that the world may believe that thou hast _____ me. . . . I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made _____ in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (Jn. 17:21, 23)

10. How will the world look upon those who are abiding in Jesus? “If the world _____ you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its _____, but because ye are not of the world, but I have _____ you out of the world, therefore the world _____ you.” (Jn. 15:18-19)

The Pruning Process

1. How does John describe the pruning process? “. . . every branch that beareth fruit, he _____ it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” (Jn. 15:2)

Note: The Greek word “purges” here is *katharizo* from which we get the word “catharsis”. The work of pruning is thus a work of cleansing.

2. How does Ellen White describe the pruning process? “The pruning will cause _____, but it is the Father who applies the knife. He works with no wanton hand or indifferent heart. There are branches trailing upon the _____; these must be cut loose from the earthly supports to which the tendrils are fastening. They are to reach _____, and find their support in God. . . . The excessive foliage that draws away the life current from the fruit must be pruned off. The _____ must be cut out, to give room for the healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness.” (DA 677)
3. What is the knife which God uses to prune the branches of the vine? “That he might sanctify and _____ it [the church] with the washing of water by the _____, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having _____, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be _____ and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26-27)
4. According to Jesus, how are we sanctified? “Sanctify them through thy _____, thy _____ is truth.” (Jn. 17:17)
5. According to Paul, what is the Word of God like and what type of work does it perform? “For the word of God is _____, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged _____, piercing even to the dividing asunder of _____ and _____, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and _____ of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12)
6. What did king David have to say about the function of God’s word? “Wherewithal shall a young man _____ his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy _____. . . . Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not _____ against thee.” (Ps. 119:9, 11)
7. What did Jesus say about His disciples in John 15:3? “Now ye are _____ through the _____ that I have spoken unto you.”

Note: The word “cleansed” here is used in only one other place in the gospel of John, that is in chapter 13 and verse 10. When Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, He was symbolically cleansing their hearts. But notice that Jesus said that not all had been cleaned or pruned. As we shall see later, He was speaking of Judas Iscariot (see Jn. 17:12).

8. What, specifically, needs to be pruned from our lives? “He [the Father] prunes them, because _____, self-indulgence, and _____ are cropping out in their lives.” (Testimonies for the Church, volume 4, p. 354)
9. Is the process of pruning painful? “God prunes us with _____, with disappointment and _____, that the outgrowth of strong, perverse traits of _____ may be weakened and that the _____ traits may have a chance to develop.” (Testimonies for the Church, volume 4, p. 354)
10. What two types of reactions result from the painful pruning process? “Those who really desire to _____ God will be _____ for the exposure of every idol and every sin, that they may see these evils and put them _____; but the _____ heart will plead for _____ rather than _____.” (Testimonies for the Church, volume 4, p. 354)
11. How can we be sure that conversion is genuine? “No conversion is genuine which does not _____ both the character and the _____ of those who accept the truth. The truth works by love, and _____ the soul.” (5BC 1144)

The Fruitless Branches

1. Who was the fruitless branch in the Upper Room? “From the chosen twelve who had followed Jesus, one [Judas] as a _____ branch was about to be taken away; the rest were to pass under the pruning knife of _____ trial.” (DA 676-677)

Note: Raymond E. Brown concurs with Ellen White: “In the atmosphere of the Last Supper Judas may be thought of as a branch that did not bear fruit; he is now a tool of Satan and belongs to the realm of darkness.” (The Gospel According to John, volume 2, p. 675-676)

2. What characterizes the dead branches? “A profession of religion places men in the _____, but the character and _____ show whether they are in connection with Christ. If they bear no fruit, they are _____ branches.” (DA 676)
3. What evidence do we have in this parable that saved people can choose to be lost? “Every branch _____ me that beareth not fruit he _____ away.” (Jn. 15:2, also v. 6 and Mt. 24:12; II Pet. 2:20-22)

Note: The noted commentator, Raymond E. Brown, has well remarked: “So also in John the branches that are burned were once united to Jesus the vine. The expression ‘withered’ occurs in Mark 4:6 in the Parable of the Sower to describe the fate of the seed that falls on rocky ground and begins to grow, only to be scorched by the sun.” (The Gospel According to John, volume 2, p. 679)

4. Who determines whether a branch remains attached to the vine or is taken away? “When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound Himself to humanity by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the _____ of man himself.” (Steps to Christ, p.72)

5. What will happen when the church continuously abides in Christ? “When this condition is fulfilled in those who profess to believe the present truth, we shall see a _____ church; for its members will not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and they will be _____ branches of the living Vine.” (5BC 1144)

