

# Life is by Union with the Vine

*Encounters*

By David Simpson

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**Bible Text:** John 15:1-2

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Providence for Today welcomes to the study of God's incomparably precious and never changing Word. This is Pastor David Simpson on behalf of Providence Church of Powell, TN and friends of the gospel of God's sovereign grace. We trust God will powerfully and effectually reveal his Word to our hearts and apply it to our lives. Providence Church place of worship is located at 104 Foust Carney Road. You will find us on Clinton Highway just up from the Claxton Elementary School. When writing, please address mail to P. O. Box 1467, Powell, TN 37849. Our radio broadcast, Sunday sermons and other resources are available on our website. Please visit us at [www.providenceundergrace.com](http://www.providenceundergrace.com). You can also listen to additional messages by downloading the Sermon Audio mobile app on your handheld devices or by visiting sermonaudio.com. Then, if you'll type in "Pastor David Simpson" you will find your location. And you can join us on Facebook at Providence Church. Of course, your interest and attendance with us in worship on Sundays at both 10 and 11 a.m. is welcomed and the Lord willing, I will be bringing a message from God's Word in both hours each Sunday. We are now in our third year at WYSH radio, broadcasting out of both Clinton and Knoxville, TN which are nestled near the beautifully Smokey Mountains. Via the internet, the broadcast has the potential of reaching folks with the gospel across the globe. Throughout various electronic means, we have heard from folks as far away as California and Africa. I continue to be grateful for the support and prayers of so many. It is my prayer that God will cause his Word to reach his children sheep and that he will call each one by his sovereign grace, declared in his gospel wherein the righteousness of God is revealed.

In our study of the encounters with Jesus in John's gospel, we have concluded the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter and we have stepped into the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter now. In this encounter with Jesus and his disciples, we find a rather lengthy statement of great depth and importance. In our present study, we will hear Jesus speak of himself as the vine and furthermore say that union with the vine produces life.

As the Lord and his disciples departed the Upper Room on this starry Passover Eve, they walked past the Temple heading towards Bethany, his home base for the week. The gates and doors of the Temple would've been open on this Passover Eve which they were not always open. And these gates were finely forged in Greece and then floated across the Hellespont and brought to Jerusalem, then placed at the opening to Herod's Temple. So,

the beautiful gates were opened and they were so beautiful that they were a tourist attraction in that part of the world. The gates were made of bronze and worked into them was a golden vine. A vine typified national Israel as we have demonstrated. And as we have on our United States Currency "In God We Trust," so on the Maccabean coins, they had a vine representing Israel.

We saw last week the words of Psalm 80:8-9 where it says, "Thou have brought a vine out of Egypt; Thou have cast out the heathen, and planted it. You prepared room before it, and did cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land." Obviously, it is a metaphor: vine being a metaphor for national Israel. But then Hosea speaks and Hosea said in chapter 10:1-2, "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. Their heart is divided." What Hosea was talking about was saying that they were a vine, but they're an empty vine. They are a vine who is given over to idolatry and their worship is empty, that's what he means by images. And that's what idolatry is, it is the worship by means of imagery. Men naturally move to imagery whether it is a cross in our day or whether it was a picture of the moon or the stars in that day. Idolatry is the worship through the means of imagery.

Listen to what Jeremiah said in chapter 2, "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine," so, he's talking about in the beginning, what God had done, "wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" Across the generations, the nation, her priests, her prophets and the people had forgotten and turned from God who called them and gave them life. They corrupted the institutions given to them by their forefathers and yes, Israel was the vine but she was an empty vine, she was a degenerate plant and a strange vine. What descriptions of national Israel. You see, her time had run its course by the time we arrived at the first century. The vine of Israel foreshadowed the true vine, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But watch what happens: as Christ and his disciples walked by, they observed the symbol. It is one with which they were familiar from childhood and he is about to declare it to them the meaning of all of this vine. Christ made this profound and history rebutting statement: national Israel was not the vine that gives life. In short, salvation is not in connection with Israel where God had deposited his law, his covenants, his promises, his revelation and his history. Yes, he had done all of that, but I remind you that she had become an empty vine, a degenerate vine and a strange vine. So, all of that has passed now. All the types and the symbols are fulfilled and set aside with Christ's work. Peter would later declare, understanding what Jesus is saying, "Neither is their salvation in any other for there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved."

Did not Peter learn this from the Lord Jesus himself? Certainly he did. He had heard Jesus say, "I am the way and the truth and the life and no man comes unto the Father but by me." You see, when Jesus says "but by me" he means not by Israel but by me. Not by works but by me. Not by man's will but by me. He and he alone.

In this 15<sup>th</sup> chapter, we find, of course, a parable of the vine. Christ is talking about that which is real but he uses the vine to illustrate. And the principle characters of the vine I gave to you last week, let me speak of them one more time so it's all clear before us and maybe you didn't get to listen last week. The true vine, of course, is Christ. The husbandman, the gardener, is God the Father and the branches are the elect and the fruit is love for God and love for the brethren. It is faithfulness to God and faithfulness to the brethren. Now, dear friend, a vine and a branch are one. In other words, there is union between Christ and the vine, his elect branches. And branches have only one purpose, they are not for shade, they are for fruit. And Jesus used the word "fruit" eight times if you were to count it, in this 15<sup>th</sup> chapter. Typically, eight is the number for resurrection being the eighth day or what we might say, is the first day of the week. So, typically, the Lord declared the spiritual fruit that will come from his own resurrection.

And so, with these few thoughts, consider with me some of the words here in the opening of chapter 15. Jesus said, "I am the true vine." Literally, it reads "I am the vine, the true one." I am, of course, a wonderful and marvelous declaration by our Lord from all the way back to his encounter with Moses in the Book of Exodus but here in John 1:9 he said, "I am the true light." And what did he do but contrast himself with John the Baptist. As great a man as John the Baptist was he, of course, was not the true light.

In chapter 6:32 he is declared to be "the true bread," and there he is in contrast with the manna. Now, the manna in the Old Testament was very important. God had fed the children of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness and how important it was for them to know that he fed them. But that manna was a picture; it was a type; it was a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ and he said, "I am the true bread."

In Hebrews 8:2 he is spoken of as "the true Tabernacle," and that means that he is contrasted with the earthly and temporal Tabernacle and Temple. Yes, he is the true one, meaning he is the place of worship, he is the place of sacrifice, he is the place of worship. He is the place where you meet God. He is the priest and he's the sacrifice and he's the laver and he is the inner room. He is all of it. He is the true Tabernacle.

What is being said is: life comes by union with the Lord Jesus Christ, not by union with Israel but by union with the Lord Jesus Christ. And notice that the heavenly Father is the overseer of the vineyard. The Lord made it absolutely clear that spiritual salvation and life comes not by ceremonies, even God-given ceremonies. The Temple practices were given to Moses but were intended to reveal and to direct them to Christ. For most of them, he just made them more religious.

No action on the part of man, however, can bring man into union with Christ. Not by his will and not by his ways. You see, that is the mysterious work of God the Holy Spirit in spiritual awakening or spiritual regeneration. A preacher may say the moment you trust or accept Jesus you will be spiritually born, you've probably heard them say that, I have heard it said myself. But that is not true. No. Spiritual birth is the work of the sovereign Holy Spirit. Jesus revealed how little man has control in new birth by saying, "The wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound thereof but you can't tell where it comes or

where it goes. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit,” in John 3:8. So, when I’ve said how little a man has control, I ask you, how much control do you have over the wind? Can you direct the wind? Can you say, “yes,” or “no,” and the wind will listen to you? Can you have any effect upon the wind whatsoever? Why, no, you cannot and neither can I. Neither you by your will, neither you by your repentance or your faith or your work can direct the Holy Spirit. He is the one who sovereignly awakens.

James said it very clearly, “Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth,” in James 1:18. When the Holy Spirit enters the inner man and under what circumstances he does that, we have absolutely no control. We know this, it is just a matter of time until he brings the awakened elect under the sound of the gospel of grace conditioned on Christ alone. The Holy Spirit takes up residency and he abides. He gives life and he directs to Christ. Spiritual birth is not salvation from sin and from condemnation, that was at the cross. It is salvation from darkness and from ignorance by his light and by his life.

Jesus saying he is the vine reminds me of Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 53:2 where it says, “For he shall grow up before him,” that is, the Son before the Father, “as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.” Dear friend, the Lord Jesus Christ is the only source of spiritual life but you won’t find him in free-will religion. You won’t find him in ritual religion. You won’t find him in works religion or in man centered humanistic religion. No, you absolutely will not. He is identified singularly by righteousness earned and imputed in connection with his finished work, sovereignly by God at the cross. His effectual call is irresistible to all for whom he died. They will know the truth and will have union with him.

Then listen to what Jesus said: not only did he say “I am the true vine,” but he also said “My Father is the husbandman.” Christ identified the Father as the gardener, if you please, the cultivator, the caretaker. The overseer of the vineyard, meaning his people. You see, the Father is invested in caring for, protecting, watching over his people. Don’t we also see his faithfulness to his purpose and to his people in this promise by the Lord Jesus? At once this statement is comforting and also searching. He trusts not the oversight of his chosen people to a system, not to a single man such as a pastor or a bishop or an elder or even to a group of men. Certainly not to a hierarchy system in a religion, or to some committee that’s going to look over the lives of people. No sir. Dear friend, he is himself the caretaker and if he can’t take care of his church and if he can’t take care of his people, then it is for sure that none of us can do it. Peter said this in 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your care upon him; for he cares for you.” If you can ever get it fixed in your mind that if you’re his he cares for you, he is not going to leave you to yourself and let you fall away from him.

Then listen to what Jesus said in verse 2, “Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away,” that’s the first thing he said. Let me talk about that. As I said previously, it is essential, it is very essential that we understand to whom he spoke. He spoke only to his 11 disciples, Judas has been dismissed. There are no others there. This is not a mixed audience. He spoke to his chosen, called, regenerated, believing men. When he said “branch,” the little word “branch” is a word which means to break. It’s an interesting

word, it refers to a tender, easily broken offshoot of the vine. So, here you have the vine growing out of the ground and it's early in the Spring and you have a little, tender, easily broken offshoot of the vine and he calls that a branch. And he says, "Every branch in me," he means in connection with me, in union with me, savingly connected to me. Not those who appear or those who merely profess to be, but every branch in me. Then he says, "that bears not fruit." Literally, that is no longer bearing fruit.

Some foolishly appeal to this verse as proving falling from grace, as they like to call it, meaning losing your salvation. But, truly, nothing could be further from the truth. Again, I remind you this is not a mixed crowd. Furthermore, Jesus was not attempting to move them to action or to create fear. He was simply seeking to encourage and give them hope. So, he's not trying to get them to do something and he's not trying to create any kind of fear but he's trying to encourage and give hope.

I love the way Peter says what he has to say in 2 Peter 1:5. Listen to these words, "And beside this, give all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, what he is talking about are the characteristics of a fruitful believer. And then, to really understand this, if you would skip on down if you had your Bible open to verse 10 where Peter exhorted them, "make your calling and election sure." And I call this an exhortation because he does use the word "make," he's exhorting them that you make your calling and election sure. What is he saying? Well, by calling Peter spoke of the effectual call of grace. He's not talking about call to a church membership or the call of a pastor to a church or the call to some function in the body of believers but he's talking about the effectual call to grace. When he spoke of election, he spoke of the unconditional election by God of his people before the foundation of the world.

If the calling, this question arises, if the calling is end time, which it certainly is, and the election is before time, then why does he say calling and election? Well, that's really not a hard question. It is because it is by calling rather that we lay hold of, we see, we know, we rest in God's election. So, by calling we lay hold of the truth of God's election. He used the word "sure," not to say we can make it more certain but we can be more assured. You see, assurance of God's election in the gospel was Peter's subject. He was saying the same thing, if you please, that the Lord was saying. He was saying, "Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away," but now he's talking about "every branch in me that bears," and then he says, "he takes away." He takes away. The Greek word for "take away" is one word, is "airo," and it means to lift or to carry or to take away. What he means is, God takes us away from our unfruitful course. Here is a brother, such as we would shortly see Peter in, I think, for example, of Peter who is shortly going to be just exactly like this. The Apostle Peter is going to be on a course that is unfruitful and denying the Lord.

Remember that the purpose here is not judgment but the purpose is cleansing and I know that because if I go on down and read verse 3, Jesus said, “you are clean through the word.” That’s what he’s talking about is being cleansed. You see, his purpose was not to judge Peter when Peter did deny him, though he looked at him with a very stern look. I wouldn’t want him to look at me like that, though I’m sure I’ve needed it more than once and need it, yea, even now. But he looked at him to cleanse him through the Word. The cleansing is not to make fit for heaven because he had already told Peter that “you’re all clean.” But it was to enable his elect son to live assuredly and profitably glorifying God and loving his Word and his people. Jesus is teaching what we might call the perseverance of the saints. He is also speaking of his own preservation.

So, God as the gardener will preserve and his people will persevere. Then watch what Jesus said: “and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” Surely, we can see Jesus spoke to the branches who are in vital union and in fellowship with him. He said, “every branch that bears fruit,” meaning they have repentance and faith in the virtues that we enunciated, that we saw enunciated by Peter.

Jesus said “he purges.” This is a word you may be familiar with like *katharizo* which means to cleanse. It seems a strange thing to us perhaps, but Jesus spoke of cleansing the leaves of the vine of bacteria or insects or perhaps moths or foreign parasites. It is a type of his cleansing his elect so that they will remain the way of being fruitful and growing in grace. And you ask, How does that happen? Well, by the Word. Psalm 119:9 it says, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” But also by the trials of life. James said, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations knowing this that the trying of your faith works patience but let patience have her perfect work that you may be perfect and entire wanting or lacking nothing.”

Jesus said “that you may bring forth more fruit.” Is the gardener going to fail in his purpose of our bringing forth more fruit? Absolutely not. He is going to move us or take us away from any course of spiritual dishonor. He is going to purge us to bring forth more fruit. Paul said this in Romans 5, “We glory in tribulations also knowing that tribulation works patience and patience experience and experience hope and hope makes not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us.”

Yes, dear friend, by his Word and by the trials of life God, indeed, purges us that we may bring forth more fruit but all the time, the very Spirit of God is abiding and resting in his people.

Well, I didn’t get very far into John’s 15<sup>th</sup> chapter. We’ll pick up here again next week but my time is running out again so I must stop. Let me remind you that John’s gospel is built on a series of encounters which we’re talking about, between Jesus and a variety of persons. Each encounter builds on a single premise and it is this: that the eternal Word of God entered the human race to put away the sin of his elect people and earn the righteous satisfaction of the whole of God. The resulting righteousness God imputed or reckoned,

transferred, accounted to the spiritual and eternal account and record of his chosen people. Thus, it was by all means a very sovereign and particular act. By that righteousness, God's grace stands sufficient and efficient for all the Father gave him. It happened by the cross God forgave, God redeemed, God reconciled and God justified his chosen people to himself. By faith they look back upon his full and complete accomplishment as their salvation. In this single message, believers find rest in their souls. O, it would be my prayer that you would find rest in your soul in this message of a completed salvation in connection with Jesus Christ.

Let me remind you that Providence Church, our place of worship is located at 104 Foust Carney Road in Powell, TN. You can find us on Clinton Highway just a little bit up the hill from the Claxton Elementary School. When writing, please address mail to P. O. Box 1467, Powell, TN 37849. And I would love to hear from some of you. Our radio broadcast of Sunday Sermons and other resources are available on our own website. You can visit us at [www.providenceundergrace.com](http://www.providenceundergrace.com). You can also listen to additional messages by downloading the Sermon Audio mobile app on your handheld devices or by visiting [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com). If you'll type in "Pastor David Simpson" you will find your location. Your interest and attendance with us in worship on Sundays at 10 and 11 a.m., of course, is welcomed.

Until next time, this is Pastor David Simpson saying: May the light of Providence direct all your paths and may the hand of Providence supply all your needs.