

# EXPLANATION OF 43<sup>RD</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## JOHN 15 (A.D. 70-95)

### INTRODUCTION

In John 15 Jesus exhorts his followers to be his disciples with 6 characteristics. The tone of exhortation (to action) is important.

The 6 characteristics of a disciple are: 1. To remain continually in Christ. 2. To let Christ's Word continually remain in you. 3. To pray on the basis of your relationship to Christ and his Word. 4. To bear much and lasting fruit. 5. To love other disciples. 6. To obey Christ's commandments and to testify to the world.

The three commands: "Remain in me", "Love each other" and "You also must testify" divide chapter 15 into 3 parts and teaches the three most important things a believer can do: 1. To maintain a personal relationship with Christ. 2. To walk in love with one another. 3. To be Christ's witnesses in the world.

Fruitfulness. Shortly before his trial and crucifixion Jesus urged his disciples to persevere in faith and to bear much fruit and lasting fruit! Fruitfulness was often depicted in Israel as a vine<sup>1</sup>.

Reality. During this last Passover meal with his disciples Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and spoke clearly about 'the fruit of the vine'<sup>2</sup>. It is thus possible that Jesus gave instruction about the Vine and the branches (chapter 15) in connection with the institution of the Lord's Supper (chapter 13). Jesus wanted the disciples to see beyond the symbols used in the Lord's Supper: the bread and the wine, and see the reality, namely Jesus Christ himself.

### OUTLINE

(I) 15:1. The allegory of the Vine and the branches.

- a. John 15:1-17 is an allegory.
- b. The rules for interpreting an allegory.
- c. The allegory of the vine and the branches.

(II) 15:1-8. Remain in Jesus Christ.

- a. There is only one true Vine (15:1).
- b. The importance of bearing fruit (15:2).
- c. The importance of being clean (15:3).
- d. The responsibility to believe and to obey (15:4).
- e. The outcome for believers in Jesus Christ (15:5).
- f. The outcome for unbelievers (15:6).
- g. The promise for believers (15:7).
- h. The highest goal for believers (15:8).

(III) 15:9-17. Remain in the love of Jesus Christ.

- a. Genuine love (15:9-12).
- b. Genuine friendship (15:13-15).
- c. Genuine election (15:16-17).

(IV) 15:18-27. Remain witnesses of Jesus Christ.

- a. The world hates Christians because they live in a different way (15:18-21).
- b. The hatred of the world is sinful and unforgiveable (15:22-25).
- c. The response of Christians to the hatred of the world is to witness (15:26-27).

### EXPLANATION

#### (I) 15:1. The allegory of the Vine and the branches.

##### a. John 15:1-17 is an allegory.

An example of a straightforward teaching in the Bible is John 14:15-27.

An example of a parable in the Bible is Luke 10:30-35. A parable has only one main message. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the main message is: You are a neighbour to the one you show mercy.

An examples of an allegory in the Bible is John 15:1-17<sup>3</sup>. It is not a teaching about a real vine, but an allegory, a *static picture* of a vine that has two kinds of branches: those that bear fruit and those that don't. An allegory is *an extended comparison and has several different points of comparison*. For example, in this allegory 'the gardener' represents God the Father, 'the vine' represents Jesus Christ, 'the branches that bear fruit' represent genuine Christians and 'the branches that never bore fruit' represent nominal Christians or non-believers.

Genuine believers always bear fruit. But non-believers or nominal Christians never bear fruit, even though they may be closely associated with Jesus Christ in his life. Because 'the vine' and 'the branches' represent people, 'the fruit' first of all represents people. The allegory does not say that Jesus is actually a vine with branches and grapes on it. It implies that the relationship between Jesus and the people can be compared to a vine and its branches. We should not attempt to explain every characteristic of the symbol (the allegory).

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 80:9-16; 128:3; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 17:1-10; Joel 2:22; Zachariah 8:12; Malachi 3:11

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20

<sup>3</sup> Also John 10:1-16

### b. The rules for interpreting an allegory.

These rules are found in the explanation of John chapter 10. Although Jesus gives several different points of comparison, there is just one central message in this allegory: namely, genuine believers in Jesus Christ will always bear fruit.

### c. The allegory of the vine and the branches.

There are just two kinds of people in the world: Christians and non-Christians.

**Believers are compared to branches that bear fruit (15:2b,5,8).** They are branches that are pruned (15:2b) and clean (15:3). These branches represent people who have a close and confidential relationship with Jesus Christ, because they accepted his Word, the gospel message, and have been cleansed through that Word (15:3; cf. 1:12). They bear much fruit (15:5).

**Unbelievers and non-Christians are compared to branches that bear no fruit (15:2a,6).** They are dry branches that are cut off and burned (15:2a,6). *These branches represent people who never had any close and confidential relationship to Jesus Christ*, because they have rejected the gospel message (cf.1:11). They never bore fruit (15:2a). Their relationship to the Vine (Jesus Christ) does not imply regeneration or salvation, because *not all people that are among God's covenant people actually share in that covenant*<sup>4</sup>. *Nothing in the Bible suggests that it is possible that born-again believers in Jesus Christ can lose their salvation or go lost again*. Also verse 2 and verse 6 do not suggest that it is possible for a believer in Jesus Christ to back-slide and lose his salvation again. The people who nevertheless teach such a false doctrine are contradicted by what Jesus Christ himself clearly teaches in this Gospel (5:24; 6:37,39; 10:28; 17:2-3,12); by what the apostle Paul clearly teaches (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4-6; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 1:9-10); and by what the apostle Peter clearly teaches<sup>5</sup>. Whoever believes that a human being can tear himself loose from the power of God, believes that he can dethrone God. (10:28-30). That, of course, is never possible!

## (II) 15:1-8. Remain in Jesus Christ.

### a. There is only one true Vine (15:1).

**15:1.** I AM<sup>6</sup> (vipa) the real (true) vine, and my Father is (vipa) the vine-dresser (gardener).

This is the seventh 'I am' statement of Jesus Christ. Although there have been many other religious leaders (vines) with their followers (branches) throughout the history of this world, there is only one real (true, genuine) Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (14:6)<sup>7</sup>.

As the branches find their unity, life and ability to bear fruit only in their physical connection to the vine, so Christians find their unity, life and ability to bear fruit only in their spiritual connection to Jesus Christ. But then their connection to Jesus Christ must be a genuine inner connection evident in their bearing fruit and not a pretended outward connection evident in their being dry branches!

Jesus is speaking of 'his Father' and not of 'our Father'. God the Father (the first Person of the Triune God) is responsible for the care of the branches (cf. 6:44-45,37)!

### b. The importance of bearing fruit (15:2).

**15:2.** Every branch in me that bears (vppa) no fruit he takes away (vipa), and every one that does bear fruit (vppa) he cleanses (vipa), in order that it may bear (vsipa) more fruit.

**The present cutting and the final cutting.** Every vine-dresser cuts away branches that bear no fruit. Likewise God rejects people who bear no spiritual fruit. God has created people, not for their own sakes, but for himself<sup>8</sup>. God cuts away the old nature and bad habits, so that the believers bear more fruit. But in verse 6 he cuts away the branches that have never born fruit (the unbelievers, the nominal Christians). The first cutting or pruning (15:2) represents 'sanctification now on earth'. The second cutting (15:6) represents 'the final judgement at the second coming'.

### The meaning of 'fruit' in the Bible.

- Fruit represents people who are converted and become believers in Jesus Christ (4:36-37; 12:24)<sup>9</sup>.
- Fruit represents mature, functioning and persevering believers (disciples) (15:16).
- Fruit represents the good works in keeping with conversion<sup>10</sup>.
- Fruit represents spiritual characteristics, like love, joy and peace, produced by the Holy Spirit<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Hosea 1:9; John 6:70-71; Romans 2:28-29; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 1:2

<sup>6</sup> G: egó eimi

<sup>7</sup> Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 43:7; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16

<sup>9</sup> Colossians 1:5-6

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 5:16; Luke 3:8-14; Romans 7:4

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

Good fruit is only produced by good trees (born-again believers)<sup>12</sup>.

Good fruit is the result of responding to the words of Jesus Christ in the Bible<sup>13</sup>.

Good fruit as wisdom, purity, peace-loving, consideration, submissiveness, mercifulness, impartiality, sincerity, peace and righteousness come from above, from God<sup>14</sup>.

Fruit therefore consists of motives, attitudes, spiritual virtues, words and deeds that all come forth as a result of faith in Jesus Christ. The deeds consist of bringing other people to faith in Christ, making people disciples of Christ (mature believers) and helping them to grow in Christian character.

Branches that bring forth good fruit are cared for, so that they may produce even more fruit. Branches that have born thirtyfold fruit can also bear sixtyfold and hundredfold fruit.

### c. The importance of being clean (15:3).

**15:3.** Already you are (vipa) clean because of the word which I have spoken (vira) to you.

The verb 'to speak' stands in the perfect tense and indicates that the words of Jesus Christ keep on working in the lives of believers and have a permanent effect in their lives. By faith (3:16)<sup>15</sup> in the Word (the teaching) of Jesus Christ (3:34; 5:47)<sup>16</sup> the eleven disciples of Jesus have become clean (cf. 13:10), that is, they have been justified<sup>17</sup>. Due to their acceptance of the completed work of salvation of Christ, God the Father has declared them perfectly righteous (completely forgiven) and regards and treats them as perfectly righteous forever. This is the position or state of Christians in Christ<sup>18</sup>.

### d. The responsibility to believe and to obey (15:4).

**15:4.** Remain (vmaa)(imperative) in me and I (will remain) in you. Just as the branch cannot (vipn) bear (vnpa) fruit of itself unless (if not) it remains (vspa) in the vine, so neither you, unless (if not) you remain (vspa) in me.

**The responsibility to exert oneself.** The people who bear fruit are those who come close to Jesus Christ, accept him into their hearts and lives and continue to relate with him every day. Because Christ remains in them, they are watchful, diligent and persevere to bear fruit.

- **The responsibility of God.** The work of God is love in election. For a person to become a branch in the vine is in the first place the merciful and gracious work of God<sup>19</sup>. He causes them to be born again (3:3-8) and brings them to repentance and faith<sup>20</sup>! God loved us first<sup>21</sup>. Jesus Christ promises that a branch that is genuinely connected to the vine will not be cut off. A person who is a genuine born-again believer in Jesus Christ will never perish (5:24; 10:28; 17:12)<sup>22</sup>.
- **The responsibility of man.** The responsibility of man is faith in obedience. For a person to become a branch in the vine is in the second place the responsibility of man. He must accept the word that has been proclaimed by faith (1:11-12; 3:18a,36a)<sup>23</sup>. To remain a branch in the vine is the responsibility of the believer (15:4). He must persevere in faith, because the word 'to believe' stands in the present continuous tense (3:16)<sup>24</sup>. His responsibility is to remain on board the ship<sup>25</sup>; to listen to the voice of the shepherd and to follow him (10:27); to hear Jesus speaking to him<sup>26</sup>. *Without exertion there can be no salvation.* "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose"<sup>27</sup>. Whoever obeys the commands of Jesus Christ, will experience assurance of salvation (14:21,23)!

Although Christ is the first to speak his words to each Christian and he is the first to love the Christian, the Christian has a responsibility to respond to his love and his words. He should make an effort to maintain a personal relationship with Christ and to continually obey Christ's Word. The Christian must exert himself to love Christ with all his heart, mind and energy and the Christian must exert himself to do what Christ teaches.

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 7:16-20; 12:33

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 13:8,23

<sup>14</sup> James 3:17-18

<sup>15</sup> Acts 10:43; Romans 3:22

<sup>16</sup> 12:48; Acts 2:41

<sup>17</sup> Romans 5:1

<sup>18</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 2:8

<sup>20</sup> Acts 13:48

<sup>21</sup> 1 John 4:17; cf. Romans 10:14-17

<sup>22</sup> Philippians 1:6; cf. Matthew 24:24

<sup>23</sup> Hebrews 4:2a,3a

<sup>24</sup> Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 3:14

<sup>25</sup> Acts 27:22,31

<sup>26</sup> Romans 10:17

<sup>27</sup> Philippians 2:12-13

- **Man's neglect of responsibility.** Unbelief and disobedience is man's responsibility. A dry branch does not bear fruit, because it is not connected to the life of the vine! Out of itself a branch cannot bear fruit<sup>28</sup>.

Likewise, a person that is not connected to Jesus Christ by faith does not bear fruit and will never be able to bear fruit. Such a person has never responded to Christ's Word and has never had a genuine faith (3:18b,36b)<sup>29</sup>.

**Bearing fruit gives subjective assurance of salvation.** *Jesus warns that without obedience and growth a person can never experience assurance of salvation.* Without growing to spiritual maturity (being a disciple), without building up the Body of Christ and without equipping for a task the person continues to drift about out of control<sup>30</sup>. Whenever, a person thinks that he is a Christian, but he does not love Christ or obey his words, then he is in danger of becoming like a dry branch that will be rejected and cast into the fire. Such a person proves that he was never born again (3:3-8).

#### e. The outcome for believers in Jesus Christ (15:5).

**15:5.** I am<sup>31</sup> (vipa) the vine, you (are) the branches. He who remains (abides)(vppa) in me and I in him, he it is that bears (vipa) much fruit, for apart from me you can (vipn) do (vnpa) nothing.

**They bear more fruit and lasting fruit.** *The emphasis in this allegory is not on bearing or not bearing fruit, but on bearing more fruit (15:2), much fruit (15:5,8) and lasting fruit (15:16)!* What is important is the vitality and fruitfulness of the vine, Jesus Christ! People who desire to bear fruit and bear much fruit need to remain connected to Jesus Christ in a vital relationship. The secret of bearing fruit, much fruit and lasting fruit is not in the branch, but in the vine. Branches connected to the life of the vine will certainly share the vitality and fruitfulness of the vine.

**They bear fruit in dependence on (connected to) Christ.** People who are not connected to the life of Jesus Christ will never bear fruit and never be able to bear fruit. They cannot do what pleases God. They cannot do anything that has eternal value. This is not only true of immoral and corrupt people, terrorists and destroyers, but also of scientists, philosophers, philanthropists, authors of books, engineers and builders. They all produce 'good' things according to the standards of this world. "Everything that does not come from faith (in Jesus Christ) is sin"<sup>32</sup>.

Thus, without Jesus Christ, I can do nothing *that will have everlasting significance*. Active Christians should evaluate their activities and ask themselves, "Are all my activities bearing fruit for God in eternity?" I can only continue to believe that my activities will bear fruit for God in eternity, as long as I remain in Christ and he remains in me. You do not want to discover one day that you have been very active for God, yet did not bear any fruit for God.

**They bear various degrees of fruit.** Christians are expected to bear *much* fruit (15:5,8). That is why God prunes them (15:2). When God prunes the Christians, then he rebukes them, corrects them and disciplines them through hardships.

Christians are expected to bear *lasting* fruit. That is why God and other Christians keep on caring for the new Christian believers. They do not want them to backslide into unbelief.

Some Christians bear *100 fold fruit, others 60 fold fruit and others 30 fold fruit*. The reasons why some Christians bear more fruit than other Christians can be because they are more penitent, trustful, loyal, diligent, courageous, and meek in the way they respond to the word of God themselves. Or they are more productive in their work of evangelism and disciple making than others. Or they have been given different personalities, different spiritual gifts and different circumstances in life, of which God is the only Giver and the only Judge.

#### f. The outcome for unbelievers (15:6).

**15:6.** If someone (anyone) does not remain (vspa)(singular) in me, he is thrown away (vipa)(singular) as a branch (that is without the vine) and withers (viap)(singular); and these branches are gathered (vipa)(plural) and thrown (vipa) (plural) into the fire; and (the branch) is burned (vipp)(singular).

This is not a teaching about a real vine, but an allegory, *a static picture* of a vine that has two kinds of branches: those that bear fruit and those that don't.

**The branches that never once bore fruit.** The allegory clearly teaches that the branches, which are cut off and thrown into the fire, represent people who never once bore fruit, not even when they were in a close relationship to Christ.

**Compare John 15:6 with Hebrews 4:4-8.** These people were never true believers and their so-called 'in-Christ-relationship', although close, was merely an outward relationship. They could have been *enlightened* by Christ (1:9), which suggests being baptised with water<sup>33</sup>. They could have *tasted* the heavenly gift<sup>34</sup>, which suggests participating in the Lord's Supper. They could have *tasted* the preaching of God's word, which suggests attending worship services. They could have seen miracles and powerful transformations among believers. They could have even *shared* in the

<sup>28</sup> Jeremiah 17:5-6

<sup>29</sup> Hebrews 4:2b,3b

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 4:12-16

<sup>31</sup> G: egó eimi

<sup>32</sup> Romans 14:23; Psalm 127:1-2; Colossians 3:17,23

<sup>33</sup> Hebrews 6:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:4

Holy Spirit, that is, they could have been influenced by the Word of God (the sword of the Spirit)<sup>35</sup> or they could have been convicted by the Spirit of sin, righteousness and judgement (16:8-10), but nevertheless remained unrepentant and instead produced worthless thorns and thistles<sup>36</sup>!

Having a share in the Holy Spirit could suggest experiencing the laying on of hands, which presumably indicates the reception of the Holy Spirit. Simon Magus experienced this, but he was not born-again<sup>37</sup>. In born-again believers eternal life never ends! No one can snatch born-again believers out of God's hand (10:28-29)! Born-again believers can never perish (18:9).

*The conclusion is that this allegory does not teach that born-again believers could again lose their salvation. It teaches that nominal-Christians<sup>38</sup> will remain fruitless and born-again Christians will bear much fruit.*

Therefore, the people who do not bear fruit are those who come in close contact with Christ, but do not accept him. They only have an outward relationship with Christ. They may even participate in a Christian congregation and in Christian activities, but because Christ does not live in them, they cannot bear any fruit that has significance for eternity. Jesus Christ stresses the responsibility of each person who is brought into close contact with Christ: If he rejects the word of God and the light he received, there will come a time when God will stop all further work with him. The Holy Spirit will no more plead with him, his conscience will no more warn him and his heart will become hardened. Finally, he will be rejected and cast into the eternal fire.

Compare John 15:6 with Romans 11:17-24. These people were never true believers and their so-called 'in-Christ-relationship', although close, was merely an outward relationship. They could have been a part of the tree rooted in Jesus Christ, that is, they could have associated themselves with God's covenant people during the Old or New Testament, but they were spiritually dead. They were and still are irrevocably broken off from the tree rooted in Jesus Christ. *It speaks of nominal Jews and Gentiles that were or still are outwardly connected to the living tree, but only as dead and fruitless branches.*

**They were enlightened, but did not respond to the light given.** Jesus is the true Light that enlightens every man (1:9). But this does not mean that all enlightenment leads to salvation. It does not mean that every human being will be saved. It means that every human being has received some enlightenment about the truth, some knowledge that God exists, that he is powerful and has moral commands<sup>39</sup>. People, who have heard the gospel, have to some extent received insight into God's plan of salvation. No one can later excuse himself<sup>40</sup>. In spite of God's general revelation, many people still choose to remain in darkness (1:5,10-11; 3:19-21). There is an enlightenment that does not necessarily lead to salvation<sup>41</sup>. Enlightenment that leads to salvation is pure mercy and grace! The Gospel of John does not teach universal salvation (1:9). It does not teach universal atonement of sins (cf. 1:29; 10:11)<sup>42</sup>. It also does not teach that born-again believers can back-slide or perish (10:28)<sup>43</sup>.

The Gospel of John puts the emphasis on the responsibility of every human being to accept the light that is given. Every person that hears the gospel has the personal responsibility to respond to it by faith (1:12). But if he rejects the light and continues to reject the light, he hardens his heart against the Holy Spirit and Christ's Word<sup>44</sup>. Finally God hardens his heart permanently<sup>45</sup>. There comes a time when he is no longer able to hear or understand the words of Jesus<sup>46</sup>. "God's Spirit will not contend with man forever"<sup>47</sup>. At the final judgement such a person is thrown into the unquenchable fire.

#### **The consequences for those who reject the light.**

- **His present position in God's eyes:** he *already* stands condemned (3:18). He never came to Jesus and was never connected to Jesus (6:37).
- **His present condition:** he was *once for all* a dry and withered branch that was never connected to the life of the vine (15:6). Such people are "blemishes at your love feast, eating with you without the slightest qualm – shepherds who only feed themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever"<sup>48</sup>.
- **His condemnation:** he is cast out (of the vineyard). "Let them grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into

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<sup>35</sup> Ephesians 6:17

<sup>36</sup> Hebrews 6:4-8

<sup>37</sup> Acts 8:13,18-21

<sup>38</sup> Cultural Christians

<sup>39</sup> Romans 1:19-20; 2:15

<sup>40</sup> Romans 3:19-20

<sup>41</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6

<sup>42</sup> Mark 10:45; Romans 3:24-26; 4:3,25

<sup>43</sup> cf. John 15:6

<sup>44</sup> Matthew 12:32

<sup>45</sup> Romans 1:24,26,28

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 13:10-15

<sup>47</sup> Genesis 6:3

<sup>48</sup> Jude 12-13; cf. Isaiah 40:24; Mark 4:6; 11:21; Matthew 27:3-5

my barn'. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil"<sup>49</sup>.

- **His punishment:** he is cast into the fire and burned. "They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"<sup>50</sup>.  
"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"<sup>51</sup>. "Then they will go away to eternal punishment"<sup>52</sup>. "They go into hell where the fire never goes out"<sup>53</sup>. "They will be tormented day and night forever and ever"<sup>54</sup>.

#### **g. The promise for believers (15:7).**

**15:7.** If you remain (vsaa) in me and my words remain (vsaa) in you, ask (vmam)(imperative) whatever you wish (vspa), and it will take place (vifd) for you.

**The conditions for prayers to be answered.** The person must be a genuine believer. He must be connected to the life of Jesus Christ. God does not listen to the hypocritical prayers of religious people who have no personal relationship to him<sup>55</sup>. However, those who do have a personal relationship with God are urged to pray, seek and knock<sup>56</sup>.

The teachings of Jesus must remain in the believer.

- In John 8:31-32 the believer has a responsibility to do something with the Bible. He remains in the teachings of Jesus by hearing, reading, studying, meditating, memorising, obeying and passing on the truths of the Bible.
- But in John 15:7 the believer has a responsibility to let the Bible do something in his life. The teachings of Jesus must remain in the believer in such a way that they transform the believer and make him fruitful. The words of Christ influence and control his thoughts and convictions, his motives and desires, his attitudes and feelings and his speaking and behaviour. The Jewish religious leaders and former disciples, who had rejected the teachings of Jesus (5:18,38; 6:60,66; 12:37-43), cannot expect God to answer their prayers.

The believer ought to pray. The verb 'to ask or to beg' is a command. Whoever does not ask, also does not receive<sup>57</sup>. Prayer takes time and effort. Prayer requires continual searching the truth in the Bible and persevering knocking on God's door<sup>58</sup>. A true Christian will pray for fruit and he will bear fruit in answer to prayer. When Christ sends Christians to go and bear lasting fruit, we Christians realise that we can only do that in the power, wisdom and love of Christ. Therefore we Christians pray for courage and obedience to go to people and we pray for his power, wisdom and love to help these people to become lasting fruit. And again Christ gives a wonderful promise about prayer. He says that because the Christians pray in his name (15:16) for lasting fruit, he will answer them and give them the ability to bear fruit.

The genuine wishes of the believer will be given if it is in accordance with the revealed and sovereign will of God. Christians may make their wishes known to God. Peace about whatever answer God gives will guard his heart (feelings) and mind (thoughts) in Christ Jesus<sup>59</sup>. Jesus teaches Christians to pray, "Not my will, but God's perfect will be done"<sup>60</sup>. When the believer desires that God's perfect will be done<sup>61</sup>, then God will cause his perfect will to happen! Sometimes he will give what the believer asked for. Sometimes something else happens that is completely different to what the believer prayed for or expected, but then the believer must continue to believe that what happened was God's perfect will! Sometimes nothing happens for a shorter or longer time. Then the believer must know that God is using his prayers to train him in perseverance and patience<sup>62</sup>.

#### **h. The highest goal for believers (15:8).**

**15:8.** By this my Father is glorified (viap), that you bear (vspa) much fruit and become (vsad) my disciples.

God has created people for his glory<sup>63</sup>. All things have been created by and for Jesus Christ<sup>64</sup>. The disciples live to God's glory when they bear much fruit and are disciples of Jesus Christ. The highest goal of a believer is: "Soli Deo gloria" (only to God be the glory)! The glory of God consists of his attributes and his presence and these become visible when believers bear fruit and follow Christ actively.

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<sup>49</sup> Matthew 13:30,41

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 13:41-42; cf. 7:19; 13:50; Revelation 14:18; 20:15; 21:8

<sup>51</sup> Matthew 25:41

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 25:46

<sup>53</sup> Mark 9:43

<sup>54</sup> Revelation 20:10

<sup>55</sup> Isaiah 1:3-4,13-15; Matthew 6:5,7; Luke 18: 9-14

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 7:7-11

<sup>57</sup> James 4:2

<sup>58</sup> Matthew 7:7

<sup>59</sup> Philippians 4:4-7

<sup>60</sup> Luke 22:42; 1 John 5:14-15

<sup>61</sup> Matthew 6:10

<sup>62</sup> Luke 11:5-13

<sup>63</sup> Isaiah 43:7

<sup>64</sup> Colossians 1:16

### (III) 15:9-17. Remain in the love of Jesus Christ.

#### a. Genuine love (15:9-12).

**15:9.** As the Father has loved (viaa) me, so have I loved (viaa) you. Remain (vmaa)(imperative) in my love.”

**15:10.** If you keep (vsaa) my commands, you will remain (vifa) in my love, just as I have kept and have perfectly fulfilled (vira) my Father’s commands and continually remain (vipa) in his love.

**15:11.** These things I have spoken (vira) to you in order that my joy may be (vspa) in you and in order that your joy may be full (vsap).

**15:12.** This is (vipa) my command, that you continually love (vspa) one another as I have loved (viaa) you.

The love of God the Father for God the Son is grounded in eternity (17:24) and was revealed in history<sup>65</sup>. Jesus loves his disciples in the same way! The love of Jesus Christ for his disciples is also grounded in eternity<sup>66</sup> and is now revealed in history (15:9). Jesus commands his disciples to continually remain in this unique love<sup>67</sup>!

How do disciples practically remain in Christ’s love? By continually keeping his commands. Take note of the cycle of love: God (Christ) loves us first and wins us to love him in return (3:16)<sup>68</sup> and to obey his commands (14:15). Keeping his commands causes God (Christ) to love us more. And so a second cycle of love and obedience starts.

What brings real joy? Real joy is experienced when Jesus Christ remains in the believer, when his teachings transform the believer, when the believer’s prayers are being answered (15:7) and when the believer loves Jesus Christ by keeping his commands (15:10-11)! Joy is not the same as happiness. Joy is that inner joy and peace that comes with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit<sup>69</sup>. It remains joy amidst outward storms, trials and temptations<sup>70</sup>, because the believer continues to see the Invisible God with his spiritual eyes<sup>71</sup>.

The relationship of a Christian to Christ cannot be separated from his relationship to his brothers and sisters in Christ. Loving Christ means loving the brothers and sisters. And not loving the brothers and sisters means not loving Christ. “Remaining in Christ’s love” and “loving each other” are inseparable!

#### b. Genuine friendship (15:13-15).

**15:13.** Greater love has (vipa) no one than this, that he lay down (vsaa) his life for (in the place of)<sup>72</sup> his friends.

**15:14.** You are (vipa) my friends, if you continually do (vspa) what I command (vipn) you.

**15:15.** No longer do I call (vipa) you servants, because a servant does not know (by relationship and intuition)<sup>73</sup> (vira) what his master is doing (vipa). But I have called (vira) you friends (and that is what you are), for all that I have heard (viaa) from my Father I have made known (viaa) to you.

**A genuine friend denies himself so that the other may become his best for God.** “This is how we know by observation and experience (perfect tense) what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life *in the place of*<sup>74</sup> us. And we *continually* (present continuous tense) ought to lay down our lives *in the place of* our brothers<sup>75</sup>. Jesus Christ laid down his life for his friends (15:13). They are the people whom he has chosen out of the world to belong to him (15:16,19; cf. 10:11). And they show that they are his friends by doing what Jesus says (15:14). Divine election (15:16,19) and human responsibility (15:14) are inseparable from each other.

Jesus Christ laid down his life as a sacrifice of atonement for their sins. He laid down his life, not to better their lives, but to take their place in condemnation and punishment. His friends deserved to die for their own sins, but Jesus Christ took their sins upon himself onto the cross<sup>76</sup> and died *once for all* in their place<sup>77</sup>. Thus, he took away the problem (sin) as well as its consequences (separation from God and man). He bore the punishment of being forsaken by God in their place<sup>78</sup>. This is unique and cannot be mimicked by anyone.

However, Christians can follow Christ’s example of self-sacrificial love. His love was an unselfish love, it was a self-sacrificing love, it was a love that saved believers and made them to become the best they could ever become! Christians can follow this example of self-sacrificial love by dedicating their lives, time and resources for other people and help them to become their very best for God and for mankind. In some cases this may lead to death through persecution or sheer exhaustion.

<sup>65</sup> Matthew 3:17; 17:5

<sup>66</sup> Ephesians 1:4

<sup>67</sup> cf. Jeremiah 31:3

<sup>68</sup> 1 John 4:19

<sup>69</sup> Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22

<sup>70</sup> 1 Peter 1:6

<sup>71</sup> 1 Peter 1:8; Hebrew 11:27

<sup>72</sup> G: huper

<sup>73</sup> G: oida

<sup>74</sup> G: huper

<sup>75</sup> 1 John 3:16

<sup>76</sup> 1 Peter 2:24

<sup>77</sup> 1 Peter 3:18

<sup>78</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

**A genuine friend pulls the other up to live according to Christ's word.** Believers can only have assurance of their salvation when they are obedient. They can only be sure that they are Christ's 'beloved' and 'friends' when they practise his teachings. This statement of Jesus Christ is very special in the light of what was going to happen that same night: his disciples were going to betray him, flee from him and deny him.

But note Luke 22:31-32, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." "Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again" because Jesus Christ prays for him<sup>79</sup>!

**A genuine friend shares with the other what he learns from God.** The disciples are no longer called 'slaves' (cf. 13:16), but 'friends'. When a master gives one of his slaves a task to do, he does not explain to him why he has given him this task. But friends have a confidential relationship with one another in which they share whatever they have learned from God the Father. Jesus Christ told his disciples why God the Father had sent him to this earth (3:16), for whom he was going to lay down his life (10:11), why he was going to leave this world (14:2-3), what he would do at his second coming (14:16-18) and how people could be saved (3:3-8,36). When the emphasis is on the confidential relationship between Jesus Christ and his disciples, he uses the word 'friends'.

The Jewish religious leaders and teachers bundled all their 613 religious laws together and laid them as a heavy load on the necks of their followers<sup>80</sup>. But the disciples of Jesus Christ only get the light and soft yoke of Jesus to carry<sup>81</sup>! Jesus rejects the slavish obedience to religious rules and practices, but asks his followers to obey his teachings in a spirit of love and friendship.

### c. Genuine election (15:16-17).

**15:16.** You did not choose (viam) me, but I chose (elected) (viam) you and appointed (viaa) you that you should go (vspa) and bear (vspa) fruit and that your fruit should remain (last)(vspa), so that whatever you ask (vsaa) the Father in my name, he may give (vsaa) it to you.

**15:17.** These things I command (vipn) you (to do) in order that you may love (vspa) one another.

Jesus Christ chose us. Friendship on this earth consists of friends that choose one another on a basis of equality, but Jesus chose us before the foundation of the world. He died for us when we by nature were still helpless, guilty, sinners and enemies<sup>82</sup>. By nature Jesus Christ is love and even without his love for us, his essential divine nature is love<sup>83</sup>.

Jesus Christ chose us in a complete sovereign and unconditional way. The basis of his election is not in us, but in him. He chose us out of the world in order to belong to him (15:19). He chose us, not because we were already holy, but that we may become holy and remain holy<sup>84</sup>. This election is not just for church officers, but for every Christian!

Jesus Christ chose us for a specific task. He wants us to continually go out into the world and to continually bear fruit.

Jesus Christ hears our prayers. A true disciple prays that he may bear fruit, and that this fruit will remain fruit.

'The things' which Jesus commands us to do are all the things written in John 15:1-17. These things we would not be able to do in our own strength. By nature other people are often not loveable and by nature we are often not loveable. Only when we realise how Jesus Christ loves us we know how he wants us to love others. And only after the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit<sup>85</sup> are we able to love as we ought. When God gives Christians a command, he also gives them the ability to obey that command! He commands love<sup>86</sup> and he gives love<sup>87</sup>!

## (IV) 15:18-27. Remain witnesses of Jesus Christ.

### a. The world hates Christians because they live in a different way (15:18-21).

**15:18.** If the world hates (vipa) you, know<sup>88</sup> (vipa) that it hated (vira) me before you (first of you).

**15:19.** If you were (viia) of the world, the world would keep on loving<sup>89</sup> (viia) its own; but because you are (vipa) not of the world, but I chose (viam) you out of the world, therefore the world hates (vipa) you.

**15:20.** Remember (vmpa)(imperative) the word which I spoke (viaa) to you: "A servant is (vipa) not greater than his master. If they persecuted (viaa) me, they will persecute (vifa) you. If they kept (viaa) my word, they will keep (vifa) yours also.

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<sup>79</sup> Proverbs 24:16

<sup>80</sup> Matthew 23:4; Acts 15:10

<sup>81</sup> Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>82</sup> Romans 5:6-11

<sup>83</sup> Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:8,10,19

<sup>84</sup> Ephesians 1:4

<sup>85</sup> Romans 5:5

<sup>86</sup> Mark 12:30-31

<sup>87</sup> Romans 5:5

<sup>88</sup> G: ginóskó

<sup>89</sup> G: phileó



**15:21. But all these things will they do (vifa) to you for my name's sake, because they do not know<sup>90</sup> (vira) the One who sent (vpaa) me.**

The hatred of the world against Christians is a fact. 'The world' here is the realm of evil, the society of wicked people and institutions, who oppose God, Christ, his Kingdom and Christians (7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 14:17,30,31; 15:18; 17:9,14-16,25)<sup>91</sup>. This hatred existed from the very beginning of Christ's ministry (1:5,10,11; 3:11; 5:16,18,43; 6:66; 7:1,30,32,47-52; 8:40,44,45,48,52,57,59; 9:22; 10:31,33,39; 11:50,57; 12:37-43). In the early days of the apostles this evil world was represented by those Jews and their religious leaders who defied God, who rejected Christ as the Messiah and who persecuted the Church. That is why Jesus says that this evil world would put Christians out of their synagogues and even kill them. But soon 'the world' would consist of people from many nations who reject Christ.

The character and behaviour of Christians is at complete odds with the world. The reason why the world hates Christians does not lie in Christians, but in the fact that Jesus Christ chose Christians in eternity before the creation of the world<sup>92</sup> and in history by bringing them out of the dominion of darkness into Christ's Kingdom<sup>93</sup>. Already through John the Baptist he called the first disciples to repent. Also Jesus called people to repent. The word 'repent' means to change your thinking and consequently to reform your life<sup>94</sup>. Christians no longer want to do evil, no longer condone evil and no longer allow evil to go on unchecked. They repent from their own evil, preach against evil, expose evil and fight against evil. The evil world hates this opposition to their evil cause.

The world is guilty of their sin, because Christ's words and works revealed Christ and God to the world in a very clear way. They saw the light and heard the truth, but nevertheless they rejected it. Therefore, their sin and hatred is without excuse.

No Christian is immune against persecution by the world. The world will treat Christians as it treated Christ.

'The name' of Jesus Christ represents Jesus Christ as he has revealed himself<sup>95</sup> and as it is now recorded in the Bible. So when Christians proclaim the gospel about Jesus Christ and the message of the Bible, the world will hate them. That is why Jesus says, "He who loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it"<sup>96</sup>.

#### **b. The hatred of the world is sinful and unforgiveable (15:22-25).**

**15:22. If I had not come (viaa) and spoken (viaa) to them, they would have (viia) no sin. But now they have (vipa) no excuse for their sin.**

**15:23. He who hates (vppa) me hates (vipa) my Father as well.**

**15:24. If I had not done (viaa) among them the works which no one else did (viaa), they would have (viia) no sin; but now they have seen (vira) (me and my works) and hated (vira) both me and my Father.**

**15:25. But (this happened) in order that the word written (vprp) in their law might be fulfilled (vsap) "They hated (viaa) me without a cause"<sup>97</sup>.**

The Messiah, Jesus Christ, had come to his Old Testament people and had spoken to them again and again (1:5,10,11; 3:1-21; 5:17-47; 6:25-59; 7:16-38; chapter 8 and 10; 12:37-50). They had heard the gospel and had rejected it<sup>98</sup>. Now they have no excuse for their sin!

Time and again the Jews said that the God of the Old Testament was their 'Father' (8:41), but at the same time they scolded Jesus to be demon-possessed (8:48). They claimed that they loved God, but at the same time hated Jesus Christ (15:18). People can only make such a differentiation when they are still unregenerate or when they simply imagine it, because in reality this is impossible! Because God the Father and God the Son are one in essence (10:30), people can only love or hate them, accept or reject them<sup>99</sup>.

All the miraculous signs of Jesus proved that God the Father had sent him. The works of Jesus were at the same time the works of God the Father (5:17,36; 10:25; 14:9,11).

In Psalm 35:19-20 David says: "Those who hate me without reason maliciously blink the eye. They do not speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land." David had shown much favour to those who now hate him. He had treated them as brothers. But when he threatened to fall, they gathered against him and attacked him<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> G: oida

<sup>91</sup> 1 John 5:19

<sup>92</sup> Ephesians 1:4

<sup>93</sup> Colossians 1:13

<sup>94</sup> Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19a

<sup>95</sup> Acts 4:18

<sup>96</sup> Mark 8:35

<sup>97</sup> G: dórean

<sup>98</sup> Matthew 21:33-44; Hebrews 4:1-2

<sup>99</sup> cf. Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16

<sup>100</sup> Psalm 35:11-15

Psalm 69 is one of the six Psalms<sup>101</sup> that are often quoted in the New Testament:

- hate without reason (69:4)<sup>102</sup>
- the zeal for your house consumes me (69:9a)<sup>103</sup>
- the insults of those who insult you fall on me (69:9b)<sup>104</sup>
- they gave me vinegar for my thirst (69:21)<sup>105</sup>
- may the table set before them become a snare; may it become a retribution and a trap; may their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever (69:22-23)<sup>106</sup>
- may they be blotted out of the book of life (69:28)<sup>107</sup>!

According to Psalm 69 David's enemies could not tolerate his witnessing and zeal for God. David and Jesus were both hated without reason.

But nevertheless, in and through all this hatred God fulfils his eternal plan of salvation! The classic Old Testament example is Joseph: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives"<sup>108</sup>!

The great New Testament example is Jesus Christ. The hatred of his enemies crucified Christ, but precisely his death on the cross saves people<sup>109</sup>! In every event God works for the good of those who love him<sup>110</sup>! Throughout all this enmity and opposition God's eternal plan is nevertheless perfectly fulfilled, but in a way that the guilt for this enmity and opposition remains with people and not with God.

#### c. The response of Christians to the hatred of the world is to witness (15:26-27).

**15:26.** When the Helper comes (vsaa), whom I will send (vifa) to you from (the side of)<sup>111</sup> the Father, even the Spirit of truth which goes out (vipn) from the Father, he will testify (vifa) concerning me.

**15:27.** And you also must testify (vmpa)(imperative) or are testifying (vipa), for you have been (vipa) with me from the beginning."

God the Father will send the Holy Spirit (14:26) and God the Son will send the Holy Spirit (15:26). God the Father and God the Son are not only one in essence (ontological nature)(10:30), but also one in their divine functions.

When Jesus here says that the Spirit goes out from the Father, then he speaks from his state of humiliation, from his human nature. The Spirit goes out from God the Father (15:26), but also from God the Son (the Lord). (In Latin this truth is called 'the filioque')<sup>112</sup>.

The Holy Spirit will never proclaim anything but the truth! The test of all truth is Jesus Christ as he revealed himself (14:6) and the Bible (17:17). Whenever the Spirit speaks subjectively in the spirit of a Christian, what he says can and will never be in contradiction with what Christ or the Spirit (of Christ) said objectively in the Bible<sup>113</sup>.

The mission of the Holy Spirit is to represent Jesus Christ with people on earth. The Holy Spirit is the 'other' manner in which Jesus Christ returns to this world (14:16) – no longer in a limited visible body, but as the universal invisible Spirit. He reminds the disciples what Jesus Christ taught when he was on earth and teaches them everything necessary to complete the New Testament revelation (14:26)<sup>114</sup>. He does not speak his own words, but the words of Jesus Christ (16:13,15)<sup>115</sup>. He glorifies Jesus Christ in the Church and in the experience of Christians (16:14). He witnesses about Jesus Christ (15:26). And he uses the disciples of Jesus Christ as his instruments to witness about Jesus Christ!

The disciples of Jesus Christ are the official eye- and ear-witnesses of Jesus Christ, because they have been with him from the beginning of his public ministry. The Holy Spirit and the disciples are Christ's witnesses amidst the hostile world.

## APPLICATIONS

15: 2. Regard God's rebukes and corrections as a way to sanctify you and cause you to bear more fruit.

15:5. Maintain a personal and intimate relationship with Christ every day. He will cause you to bear much fruit.

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<sup>101</sup> Psalm 2, 22, 89, 69, 110, 118

<sup>102</sup> John 15:25

<sup>103</sup> John 2:17

<sup>104</sup> Romans 15:3; Hebrews 11:26

<sup>105</sup> Matthew 27:34,48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28

<sup>106</sup> Romans 11:9-10

<sup>107</sup> Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 16:1; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27

<sup>108</sup> Genesis 50:20

<sup>109</sup> Matthew 1:21; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 Corinthians 2:7-9

<sup>110</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>111</sup> G: para

<sup>112</sup> Acts 5:9; Romans 8:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19; 1 Peter 1:11

<sup>113</sup> cf. Ephesians 6:17; 2 Timothy 3:16

<sup>114</sup> 2 Peter 3:1,2,16

<sup>115</sup> cf. 1 Petrus 1:10-12

- 15:7. Allow the words of Christ to influence your thoughts and behaviour, attitudes and motives, and to change you.
- 15:9-10. Genuine love for Christ will cause you to obey Christ's teachings and commands. And obedience to Christ leads to greater love for Christ. Thus, let your love grow by obeying Christ more diligently.
- 15:13. Think how you could lay down your life every day for Christ and his cause on earth.
- 15:16. Consider that Christ has chosen you and has appointed you to go and bear lasting fruit.
- 15:21-23. Do not be surprised that the world hates you, because it also hates God and Christ and the light and the truth.

### QUESTIONS

- 15:1. Why is John 15:1-17 an allegory and not a straightforward teaching or parable?
- 15:1-8. What is the relationship of genuine believers to God the Son and to God the Father?
- 15:1-2. How do you explain the seemingly unmerciful cutting of the vine-dresser?
- 15:2. What is the nature of the fruit that Christians should bear?
- 15:3. How do people become 'clean'?
- 15:4. Who are the people who bear fruit?
- 15:5. What is the secret of bearing much fruit?
- 15:5,8. What should be the degree of fruitfulness?
- 15:6. Who are the people who do not bear fruit?
- 15:7. What are the conditions for prayers to be answered?
- 15:8. What is the highest goal for Christians?
- 15:9-12. What is the proof that you really love Jesus Christ?
- 15:13-15. What is the meaning of 'greater love'?
- 15:18-21. Why does the world hate Christ and Christians?
- 15:22-25. Why will no one have an excuse on the final judgement day?
- 15:26-27. What must be the attitude and response of Christians to the hatred of the world?