

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (NIV84)

Theme: A branch receives nutrients only through the vine.

1. The vine makes the branch pure.
2. Our fruit bears witness to our faith.

The saying goes, “every analogy limps.” That may be true, but some are better than others. The analogy in our text for today is one of the good ones. First of all, it is one that Jesus uses; plus it is one that people of all ages—from Jesus’ day 2000 years ago to the people of today can easily understand. Of course it is also a great analogy because it perfectly describes the relationship between faith in Christ and good works.

In this analogy Christ is the vine, God the Father is the gardener and we are the branches. And just like a normal vine—some branches bear fruit that is good and pleasant, while other branches bear bad fruit or no fruit at all. Today we see that that a branch receives nutrients only through the vine. For it is the vine that makes the branch pure and our fruit bears witness to our faith.

In this analogy the branches are believers or those who were formally believers. For the branches are in the vine. Those who have never been believers have never been part of the vine. So here we are talking about those who know the gospel. They either believe it now

or they used to believe it. So they either produce fruit now, or they used to.

For all branches bear fruit. It is what they do. Fruit grows from branches. Part of being on the vine is that you bear fruit. It is the natural result of being part of the vine. Unless it’s a dead branch. The same goes for being a Christian. If you are in Christ, then you bear fruit—you do good works. It is the natural result of being a Christian.

But, sadly there are some branches that don’t bear fruit. They don’t do any good works. This wasn’t always the case. At one time they did produce fruit. Perhaps they produced fruit for a long time. Others only for a short while. For some their fruit was big and juicy. Others, very small. But now, no fruit. For these branches are dead. So the gardener comes. And he cuts off the branch. And his helpers, the angels come and gather them up. **If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.** Those who don’t bear fruit will be burned in the fire of hell. And notice why they will suffer for eternity. It is not because they failed to bear fruit or enough fruit. It is because they didn’t remain in Christ—the true vine. **No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.** Those who don’t bear fruit are condemned not because of lack of fruit, but because of lack of faith—which results in not bearing fruit. As James says, **Faith, without works, is dead.** It is because of unbelief that they are punished. They chose not to be part of the vine, and so the gardener cuts them off.

But God doesn’t cut off those who bear good fruit. But he does cut us. That is, he prunes us. The gardener trims off things that might sap the branch’s strength and hinder production. He gets rid of all the blemishes and inconsistencies that prohibit our fruit. Those things could even be things that we enjoy. God prunes us through various means. A cross in our lives that we are forced to carry. Whether it be something we suffer through, or something involving a loved one. It might be painful at the time. We may wonder why it is happening. But in the end it turns out for our benefit. For it forces us to rely on the vine for strength. It makes us look at Christ instead of ourselves. And

the result is that we bear more fruit. For the more we focus on the vine the more fruit we bear. The more we gain our strength from the vine the better the fruit we bear.

When we are pruned, we are clean in a way. But not because of the fruit we bear. It's not as if our works make us pure. No, we were already pure. We have been made pure through the work of Christ. And we receive this work of Christ only through faith in him. We are already pure in God's eyes through the gospel. The Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts through the gospel. We have received the work of Christ who died to remove the guilt of our sins. And because Christ rose we know that we too will rise and live with him in heaven as God's dear children.

Because we have already been made pure we bear fruit. The fact that Christ made us pure is our motivation for bearing fruit. We do good works out of love and thanks for him. We bear fruit, not because it is expected of us. Not because it makes us feel good. We don't do good things because society, God, or other believers want us to. The only proper motivation for doing good works is to do them for Christ.

Believers bear fruit because the vine has made them pure. And our fruit proves our faith. But what about people who don't believe yet do seem to do good works?

We have already said that those who have been cut off are cut off because of unbelief. And we know they don't believe because they don't bear fruit. For those who are not part of the vine cannot bear fruit. But what about those who seem as if they are bearing fruit? What about the atheist who strives to be nice to others, to make a difference in people's lives? Or what about Jewish philanthropist who has set up charity after charity for those in need? Or person down the street, who could care less about God yet is always nice to everyone he sees? Certainly these people do good works, right?

No, because they are not part of the vine. Jesus said in verse five, **apart from me you can do nothing.** Or in Hebrews, **without faith it is impossible to please God.** It doesn't matter what you do, if it is not done through faith in Christ it is not pleasing to God. As Paul says in Romans, **everything that does not come from faith is sin.**

Unbelievers may do the same works outwardly as Christians, but these

works are not done out of love and thanks for God. They are ultimately done for selfish reasons. They may seem like good fruit on the outside. But on the inside they are rotten from improper motivations.

Believers and unbelievers may do the same things, but only the believers' works are pleasing to God. And a believers' fruit bears witness to our faith. What we do shows others what we believe. As Jesus says in verse eight, **This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.** When we bear fruit we give glory to God. For we show how much we love him by keeping his commandments. And by our actions we show that we are believers. Our fruit bears witness to the fact that we are in the vine. First comes being made pure through the work of the vine received by faith. Then comes good works.

Fruits of faith can come in many different ways. First off, showing love to God. It is obeying his will. Putting him first in your lives. It is giving to him because he first gave to you and knowing that he will take care of you. Fruits of faith is how you treat others. Looking not at your own interests, but for the interests of others. Paul tells us in Galatians, **the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** So what type of fruit do you bear? Is it good fruit or bad fruit? Or do you bear fruit at all? Most people think their fruit is good and plentiful. God may think otherwise, if they are not done for the proper motivations, or not done at all.

How sad is it when it appears as if unbelievers do the same, if not more works than believers. How can unbelievers, who do not know, or have forgotten the love of Christ—seem to bear more fruit than believers? We know that Christ has paid for our sins. We know that we will not die but live with him in heaven forever. And we should strive to show love and thanks to him by the fruit we bear. We should be motivated more than all others to bear fruit. And yet, we are often put to shame. It seems as if unbelievers do more good things than believers. It seems as if they are more loving, gossip less, are nicer to others, and so on. And this isn't to commend unbelievers. It is to shame the branches. What you do—how you treat others, how you show love to God, your life of stewardship, are results of your faith.

So if you fail to produce fruit, if you fail to obey God; you indicate you don't have faith.

Therefore it's important to remain in the vine. The more you remain in the vine, the stronger you become. For the Holy Spirit strengthens you through the nourishment of the gospel. Then you will bear more fruit. For the more you hear how Christ suffered and died for you, even though you constantly sin against him, the more you will want to give him thanks and praise for his grace. For he is the one who came down to this earth to live a perfect life that you could not. He always bore fruit, while you always fail. And yet he died and rose again for you. And he chose you to be his child despite the fact that you hated him. And because he rose he promises that you too will rise. And you will live with him in heaven forever. And until he brings you home he promises to guard you and protect you from all your enemies. And he will never leave you.

The more you hear the gospel the stronger your faith becomes. And the more you will want to show love to him by obeying his word. The more you are in the gospel the Holy Spirit will lead you to trust in him for all things. And he will lead you to do God pleasing things.

And yet, it seems as if we don't want to make use of the gospel. Like we don't want anything to do with it. But without nourishment from the vine, soon the branch loses strength. It stops bearing fruit. And God cuts it off. If you are not in the vine, you are dying. For if you not being strengthened through the gospel, you're faith is dying. Therefore lead others to the gospel. Tell them about their Savior. Encourage them to come to Worship. Get them in Bible class. And the same stands for you. Make use of the means of grace. Read the Bible at home. Attend Bible Class. Worship regularly. Bring our little ones to the font. Partake of Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins often. For God nourishes us only through the gospel of Christ. Those who remain in the vine are strengthened by the vine. And this leads us to bear much fruit.

There are few analogies that work as well as this one. Christians bear good fruit because Christians have been made pure through the work of Christ. It is through this vine that we are made pure and made able

to do good works. So get your nourishment from the vine, often and every day. Get in the gospel and fruit will follow. Amen.