



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Gospel According to St. John

## Chapter 15

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# Introduction

- One of the most frequently used illustrations in the Bible is that of a grapevine or vineyard
- Grapes were commonly grown in Israel and were greatly valued as a food
- People in that society were familiar with the activities involved in growing them
- Since illustrations help people learn, vines were often used to teach spiritual lessons, Isaiah 5:1; Psalm 80:8; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1; Romans 11:17; Luke 13:6-9; Matthew 21:33, 20:1; 1 Corinthians 3:9



# Introduction

## Chapter Outline

- The True Vine 15:1-8
- Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17
- The World's Hatred 15:18-25
- The Coming Rejection 15:26-27



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- Our Lord having gone with His disciples to the mount of Olives, employed the remaining hours of His ministry in delivering to them a long and most excellent discourse, recorded in this and the following chapter
- This discourse He began with the parable of the vine, taken probably from the vines that were growing around them on the mount of Olives
- In this parable He shows them the excellence of His teaching, and the nature of the relation in which they stood to Him
- Moreover, He explains to them the advantages which would come to them as a result from this relation



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- This is the seventh of the "I AM"
  - I AM the Bread of Life, 6:35*
  - I AM the Light of the world, 8:12*
  - I AM the Door of the sheep, 10:7*
  - I AM the Good Shepherd, 10:11*
  - I AM the Resurrection and the Life, 11:25*
  - I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life, 14:6*
  - I am the true vine, 15:1*



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- *I am the true vine*, I am to My church, and the real members what the vine is to its branches
- As the branches of the vine draw nourishment from, and are made fruitful by their union with the stock and by the care of the dresser, so my disciples are made fruitful in all holiness and righteousness by faith in Me, and in the truth and promises of My gospel, and by the influence of My Spirit
- *My Father is the vinedresser*, He has planted this vine, His providence watches over it, and by Him it is dressed and cultivated, and He views with peculiar delight the growth and fertility of its branches



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- In this passage our Lord seems to allude to Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:3-7
- “He did not mention the vine here for any other purpose but to teach His disciples that without the power of the Lord Jesus Christ they can do nothing. In accordance to this metaphor they need to abide in Him as the branch abides in the vine.” **St. John Chrysostom**
- The two chief duties of the vine-dresser, cutting off all fruitless stems, and cleansing those that bear fruit, supply illustrations of the training of human souls by the Divine Vinedresser



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- As on the natural vine there are fruitful and unfruitful branches
- As the vine-dresser will remove every unfruitful branch from the vine, so will My Father remove every unfruitful member from My mystical body - such as Judas, the unbelieving Jews, the apostatizing disciples, and all false and merely nominal Christians, who are attached to the vine by faith in the word and Divine mission of Christ, while they live not in His life and Spirit, and bring forth no fruit to the glory of God





# The True Vine 15:1-8

- *every branch that bears fruit* , He prunes away outgrowth or extra stems, and removes every thing that might hinder its increasing fruitfulness
- The fruit that the branches bear is a life of obedience to the commandments
- The promise for those who bear fruit is that they will be cleaned that they may bear more fruit
- The vinedresser prunes with care and tenderness



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- Saint John Chrysostom observes that pruning here indicates the persecutions that the believers face, for oppression does not destroy them but rather gives them more strength
- Some commentators think that He hints here at Judas who did not bear fruit and therefore deserved to be cut off from apostleship and deprived of the Kingdom
- Judas is like the fig tree which the Lord saw on His way and in which He found no fruit
- He therefore cursed it and it immediately withered away



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- Jesus states that the branches (disciples) have already been cleansed (purged, pruned), as in verse 2
- How does God cleanse or prunes us?
- God chastens by the teaching of His word
- So that we do not fall away, we need to be exhorted daily, Hebrews 3:12-13
- That we might not be disobedient, the word of God pierces our soul like a two-edged sword, Hebrews 4:12



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- To help us hold fast, we need to attend when the church is assembling together so we can be exhorted, Hebrews 10:23-25
- Some think that perhaps our Lord more immediately refers here to the words which He had spoken concerning Judas, John 13:21-30, in consequence of which Judas went out and finished his bargain with the chief priests; he being gone off, the body of the apostles was purified; and thus He might say, *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you*
- *Abide in Me, and I in you,* The phrases are here connected as cause and effect



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- The second clause, *I in you*, is the promise, which will not fail if the command of the first, *Abide in Me* be observed
- The union then, and all that follows from it, is placed within the power of the human will
- All is contained in the words, '*Abide in Me*'
- He who obeys this command has Christ abiding in him, and is a fruitful branch of the true vine
- Separated from Jesus we can accomplish nothing worthwhile



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- The branch of itself is a lifeless organ, and only fulfils its functions when it is connected with the vine
- So in the spiritual life, men apart from Christ have no original source of life and fruitfulness
- The true life flows from Him to every branch that abides in Him and making him fruitful in good
- The man who lives without faith in God may be said to exist, rather than to live, and misses the true aim of his being



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- In verse 5 Christ returns to the main theme of the previous verse, but here discriminates more forcibly the vine from the branches
- He treated the disciples themselves as the organs of His earthly fruit-bearing, *you are the branches*
- Then draws a larger circle and makes a complete and comprehensive statement, *He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit* which is the case of all that are once in Christ, and He in them, anyone
- Without the continual influence of the vine upon the branches, they bring forth no fruit



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- No plant is more fruitful than a vine is, so that influence is continuing because without the continual influence of His Spirit of grace upon us, we will be altogether barren and unfruitful
- But if we have that influence, we will not be fruitful only, but very fruitful
- For without His continuing such influence, we will not only be able to do little, but we will be able to do nothing that is truly and spiritually good and acceptable in the sight of God





# The True Vine 15:1-8

- Here, He warns us against hypocrisy
- For there are those who have the name of Christ, but are not true branches or disciples
- The thought passes from the fruitful to the unfruitful branch, from the man who abides to the man who will not abide in Christ
- In the natural vineyard such a branch was cast forth, and then withered, and was gathered with others into bundles, and burned
- The vivid picture illustrates the fearful history of a man who will not abide in Christ



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- The burning of the withered branches of the natural vine suggests the final judgment
- Jesus places Himself at the point of time of the execution of the last judgment, when those who have fallen away from Him are gathered together and cast into the fire, after they have been previously already cast out of His communion, and become withered



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- In verse 7 He returns once more to the principle of union with Himself, and of what will come out of it
- The believer in Christ, full of His words, increasingly realizing union with Christ, burning with the purposes, filled with words of Jesus, will have no will that is not in harmony with the Divine will
- The apostle John, after many years of pondering and of putting these principles into practice, confirms the truth of them, *“Now this the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”* 1 John 5:14



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- This is the true philosophy of prayer
- The psalmist had gone a long way in the same direction, “*Delight yourself in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.*” Psalm 37:4
- The living union with Christ, which made all their prayers, prayers in His name, and prayers which He would answer, and made them abound with fruit to the glory of God, was the characteristic which marked them as His true disciples
- *By this My Father is glorified*, He rejoices when you abide in Me, when you bear fruit



# The True Vine 15:1-8

- It is the honor of the vinedresser to have good, strong, vigorous vines, plentifully loaded with fruit: so it is the honor of God to have strong, vigorous, holy children, entirely freed from sin, and perfectly filled with His love
- “Do you see how he who bears fruit is a disciple? “By this My Father is glorified” means that He is pleased when you abide in Him, when you bear fruit.” **St. John Chrysostom**

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- Having given the basic teachings of the vine illustration, Jesus gives some related teachings, tying them in to previous teachings
- He had passed from the thought of their discipleship to the foundation of their union with Him and with God
- It was in the eternal love of the Father, ever going forth to the Son, and from the Son ever going forth to all who would receive it
- The Father's love and presence was ever with the Son, because the Son ever did those things which were pleasing to Him
- The love of the Son is ever present wherever willing heart of obedient disciple is open to its power



# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17

- The Father's love to Christ is eternal immutable, constant, full and perfect, wise and just, free: in all these respects Christ loves His people as the Father loves Him
- He declares His love for them to affirm to them that, though He will leave them physically, by death then later by His ascension, He loves them without limit
- He loves them as the Father loves Him, although they are not properly worthy of love
- The Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son whom the Father loves

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- *abide in My love*, They ought to continue in their love to Him
- This does not mean that, if we sin, God ceases to love us
- God loves all men, even those in sin, John 3:16; Romans 5
- To abide in love means to continue in the relationship in such a way that we receive the benefits of love
- To do this, we must act in harmony with love
- If we do not obey, then we are not acting in love and so the fellowship of love is broken
- We are not “abiding in” love, not because God does not extend it, but because we have violated it





# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17

- “Here at length He speaks in a more human manner, for this, as spoken to men, has its peculiar force. Since what a measure of love did He manifest, who chose to die, who counted worthy of such honor those who were His slaves, His haters, His open enemies, and led them up to the heavens! "If then I love you, be bold; if it be the glory of My Father that ye bear fruit, imagine nothing ill." Then that He may not make them supine, observe how He braces them again, "Continue ye in My love." "For this ye have the power to do." And how shall this be? *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love*” St. John Chrysostom

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- To encourage them in keeping His commandments He reminds them that He also has been subject to the same conditions, and by keeping the Father's commandments has remained in His love
- The Lord kept the Father's commandment always, doing those things which please Him, offering up His precious life, laying it down that He might take it again
- What the love of God was to the Christ, the love of Christ was to His disciples

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- They were as men with troubled hearts
- He has told them of the true source of peace
- His own peace He has given to them
- He tells them now of the source of joy, and has spoken the word that they may possess the very joy which was the light of His own heart
- The state of which He has spoken to them, the loving and being loved of God, is the ideal perfection of human life
- It supplies satisfaction for all the deepest desires of our being



# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17

- The capacities of the whole man are fulfilled in it, and the result is fullness of joy
- Jesus is repeating His command found in John 13:34, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*”
- Keeping of His commandments was laid down as the means of abiding in His love
- If we understand the meaning of love in our Christian life, we do not need another commandment
- Therefore, Saint Augustine says, “love God and do whatever you like.”

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- Then He showed again that love is demonstrated by what we do
- And the greatest love is that one would be willing to give his life for his friends
- The word friend in Greek means one who is loved
- These words were said not as a sermon to be examined, but as they were expressed on the eve of His crucifixion, these words declared His gospel in practice
- Here, He draws the attention of His hearers toward the cross as a practical declaration of divine love for the entire human race

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- The significance of Jesus' statement is that Christian love does not only mean the willingness to die for one's friends, or one's faith, but because this love stems from Christ, this love is a love of self-sacrifice
- The laying down of Jesus' life is spoken of as a command of the Father in John 10:18 and 14:31
- This is another example of living a life of love as a commandment for the New Covenant faithful
- It is also an example and a model of the expression of the intensity of the love Christ is calling us to give

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- Jesus sacrifice is not only a model and example but it is also the source of our love for others
- He has spoken of His own love for them as the measure of their love for each other
- St. John writes in 1 John 3:16-19, *“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s good, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”*

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- Our Lord presses obedience to His commandments as a means, and indeed the only means, by which we can declare our love to Christ
- It is sometime very hard to love those who reject our love
- We can anyone when we remember that Christ loved that person enough to die for him
- If you love Christ, through Christ you can also love him
- His friends are those who do what He commands
- He showed His love by dying for us





# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17

- We respond by showing we love Him in obeying His commands
- In a sense, Jesus loves all men and wants to be friends with them all
- He died to extend forgiveness to all
- But we receive that forgiveness and the benefits of His death only if we obey His commands
- So, we act like friends, and we receive the benefits He offers to His friends, only when we respond by obedience

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- The word here rendered “servant” means literally “bond-servant,” “slave”
- The part of the slave is mechanical obedience, without any principle of love between his master and himself
- He knows nothing of the purpose or aim of his master, and although he sees the deeds which are done, he does not know what his master do
- He had treated them as friends and sharers in their common work

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- He has revealed to them the character and attributes of the Father, and kept back from them no truth of which they could understand the meaning
- There is no contradiction with John 16:12, *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”*
- The reason He had not told them more was not on His part, but on theirs
- They could not then receive more, but in the future He would by the Holy Spirit declare to them all truth

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- Another evidence of Jesus' friendship is that He chose them
- They did not choose Him
- The disciples had chosen to serve Jesus; but much more importantly, He had chosen them and urged them to bear fruit
- In a sense, this statement is true of all disciples, in that all of us are God's elect
- But this election depends on our willingness to choose to respond to the gospel

# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17



- The fruit they were to bear refers especially to their work in testifying of Him and preaching the gospel after He had gone
- Jesus then repeated the promise that God will give whatever they ask in Jesus' name, as in 14:13-14
- This is added, to encourage their perseverance in the work He chose and called them to, which would be attended with many difficulties and discouragements
- Wherefore as they would stand in need of divine assistance, they might assure themselves of it



# Love and Joy Perfected 15:9-17

- And again in verse 17, Jesus repeated that He intended for all these instructions to lead them to love one another
- His dying for them, thus proving His friendship for them, and all the other signs of His interest and confidence, have been set before them to this great end; for while the world is full of outrage and mutual hostility and hatred, the motive of His own entire self-manifestation is to awaken a new and higher type and model of humanity



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- He has spoken of their close union with Himself, and of their love to each other
- He proceeds in the remainder of the chapter to speak of their relation to the world
- There is a striking contrast between the “love” in the last verse, and the “hatred” in this
- There was the more need for them to be close bound to each other, and to their Lord, on account of the hatred which awaited them in the world



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- Hatred is the characteristic of Satan and the pillar of his kingdom, just as love is the characteristic of Christ's kingdom
- No wonder, therefore, that those who love the world hate the kingdom of Christ without cause, for this is their nature
- *the world*, Here means the wicked men, in opposition to good men the believers, who are often in Scripture called the world
- Because they are of the earth, earthly; they take pleasure in nothing but worldly things, and pursue nothing but worldly goals
- Against this our Savior comforts them





# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- As the followers of Christ were to be exposed to the hatred of the world, it was no small consolation to them to know that that hatred would be only in proportion to their faith and holiness
- And that, consequently, instead of being troubled at the prospect of persecution, they should rejoice, because that should always be a proof to them that they were in the very path in which Jesus Himself had trod
- *If you were of the world*, Belonged to the world, were of the same spirit and principles with it, and pursued the same practices
- If, like them, you were vain, earthly, sensual, given to pleasure, wealth, ambition, they would not oppose you



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- Because you are influenced by different principles from men of the world
- You are motivated and driven by the love of God and holiness, and they by the love of sin
- The life of the true Christian silently condemns the evil world
- Therefore, the world has no other way but to resent those who do not take part in its evil
- His followers will be different from the world
- Those who truly follow Him will stand out from others



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- In the 4 sentences in verses 18-21, Jesus repeats that the world's hatred for His disciples is a rejection of Him and His word
- *Remember the word that I said to you*, For their further consolation under the hatred of the world, He asks them to remember His word, especially '*A servant is not greater than his master*'
- The evidence that the world will hate us, as Jesus had said, is that a servant is not greater than His master
- The Lord did, indeed, call them friends
- But it is suitable for them to consider themselves God's servants



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- He did not begin by mentioning how much they will be persecuted
- He began, rather, by speaking about the hardship He will endure
- He put Himself at the forefront of the battle between light and darkness
- The suffering of His disciples is only their share in the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ
- By way of consolation, He added *for My name's sake*



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- One of the main reasons of the world's hatred for believers is ignorance and lack of knowledge
- They do not know the Father who sent the Lord Jesus Christ
- “He says this, ‘they hate Me in you; they persecute Me in you. As your word is Mine, they do not obey it.’” **St. Augustine**



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- In this and the following verses, 15:22-25 our Lord shows the sinfulness of the world's hatred, because it was in the face of His revelation to them by both word, 15:22 and work, 15:24
- Had Jesus not come, the people would surely have been guilty of sin, but not of this sin
- But since He had come, they demonstrated hatred of Him, and in doing so demonstrated hatred of the Father
- His life made it obvious there was no excuse for their sins
- His life proved without question that He was the Son of God



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- Apart from this revelation, their sin would have belonged to the times of ignorance, which God overlooked, Acts 17:30-31
- It would have been the negative evil of men who do not know
- It was now the positive evil of men who, knowing the truth, willfully reject it
- Hatred against the disciples is hatred against the Master whom they represent
- Hatred against the Son is hatred against the Father whom He represents
- God is love, the heart that can hate love has hardened itself



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- He had not only come and spoken, but had done works which none other had done
- The miracles of Jesus surpassed those of Moses and the prophets in their number and in their nature
- In addition, He did all this by His own power; He spoke and it was done
- They met the evidence of works by the assertion that He was a sinner, and possessed a devil
- Their hatred led them to ascribe the highest good to the power of evil





# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- The works as well as the words of Christ might have softened their hearts, but the Divine claims provoked their malice
- *"They took counsel to kill Him" "They took up stones to stone Him"*
- They hated God as God, and goodness and truth just because they were goodness and truth
- The awful condemnation is here pronounced, *"that men loved darkness rather than light."*
- This is the most terrible condemnation that can be pronounced



# The World's Hatred 15:18-25

- *They hated Me without a cause*, The passage immediately referred to is probably that of Psalm 69:4
- The words are found also in Psalm 35:19 and less distinctly in Psalm 109:3, 119:161
- They had no reason for their sin, and therefore they hated Him without a cause
- True were these words of many earlier sufferers; but they were “fulfilled,” only in the one sinless Sufferer
- Their hatred was groundless, yet it fulfilled prophecies in their own law, which had predicted all along that Jesus would be hated and rejected



# The Coming Rejection 15:26-27

- The force of these words is to give weight to the witness which the Spirit shall bear of the Son
- He is the Advocate whom the Son will send from the Father, but He is also and definitely the Spirit of Truth proceeding from the Father, and His witness therefore will be that of the Father Himself
- The Orthodox Church have claimed this text as proving the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father only, and have quoted it as decisive against the addition of the “the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son” to the Nicene Creed

# The Coming Rejection 15:26-27



- Note again that the Spirit would be sent from the Father, and Jesus would join in sending Him
- Such language necessarily implies that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate and distinct living Beings
- All three are clearly identified here
- The Holy Spirit was the One who would be sent, but He was sent by Jesus and proceeded from the Father
- Believers taught and encouraged by influences of the Holy Spirit, would bear testimony to Christ and His salvation



# The Coming Rejection 15:26-27

- *you also will bear witness*, The Apostles themselves distinguished between their own witness of things which had come within their own experience and the witness borne by the power of the Holy Spirit, of which the Day of Pentecost was the first great instance
- “In the previous words the Lord strengthens His disciples so that they may endure the hostility of their enemies. He prepares them also by presenting Himself as an example so that they may have more courage in following Him. He gives them the promise of the Holy Spirit who will come and testify of Him so that they may become themselves witnesses through the work of the Holy Spirit in His listeners.” **St. Augustine**



# Discussion

- When Jesus says “*I am the true vine,*” what is He claiming about Himself? Have we seen Jesus make similar statements? Read John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9 & 11; 11:25; and 14:6.
- When Jesus says ‘*for without Me you can do nothing*’ what is He talking about? What things are impossible to accomplish apart from Jesus?
- What does Jesus say about those who choose to not abide in Him? Read John 15:6. Is there any eternal value in the branches that are not connected to the vine?



# Discussion

- What is the connection between keeping the commandments and abiding in Jesus and His love?
- What three conditions are given that we can ask and receive whatever we ask?
- What vine are you attached to? How do you know? What kind of fruit are you bearing? Can you accept the pruning process?



# Discussion

- What is the Holy Spirit called by Jesus? Why does Jesus give Him that title? What does it say His role will be as it relates to the mission of the disciples? What does it mean to 'witness' and why would Jesus connect this word with gospel ministry?