

THE VINE AND THE BRANCH

By Leroy Hyter

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever lives in Me and I in him bears much (abundant) fruit. However, apart from Me [cut off from vital union with Me] you can do nothing.” John 15:5 (Amplified)

As a young boy growing up, my family had a beautiful apple tree in our yard. Though we enjoyed the many rewards of the harvest of apples that came every fall, such as fresh apple pies, apple cider, apple sauce, apple preserves and even apple butter, tending to that tree and the yard from which it sat kept us children pretty busy, specially my brother and I.

There was not much to do during the winter months, but plenty to do from spring to fall. During the spring the branches of the tree would began to bud and soon little flowers would cover the tree. As beautiful a sight as it was, unfortunately, these flowers wouldn't remain on the tree. So everyday after school my brother and I had the responsibility of raking up all of the fallen flower pedals. Once all of the flowers had fallen from the tree you would have thought our work had come to an end, but it was actually just beginning, for the fallen flowers were just making way for the young apples that were soon to appear.

As the tree began to produce little green apples, many of these young apples, as they grew throughout the summer, would fall from the tree prematurely and everyday cover the yard. Leaving us once again with the morning chore of raking up all of the fallen apples. There were also times throughout the seasons, leading up to harvest time, that my father would prune the tree, cutting off dead and unhealthy branches so the tree could be more fruitful. My brother and I of course were awarded the job of collecting all of the fallen branches.

While picking up these broken off branches I noticed something quite interesting. Regardless of the stage of growth these branches were in, their ability to be fruitful had ceased the very moment they were cut off from the tree. Sometime the tree was pruned in the spring while the flowers were budding and it was evident, as I collected those branches, that they unfortunately would never produce a little green apple. There were other times, during the summer, when the tree was pruned and as I collected those branches, branches that often already had young green apples sprouting from them, I knew mature red apples would never be produced, for it was evident that all life had ended for the branches cut off from the vine of the tree. From this experienced I learned, at a very young age, the importance of the relationship between the branch of a tree and its vine.

In the Gospel of John 15 Jesus uses the vine and the branch to illustrate our relationship with Him. When we read John 15:1 we see that Jesus states that He is the True Vine and His Father is the Vinedresser.

“I Am the True Vine and My Father is the Vinedresser”

John 15:1 (Amplified)

He goes on to say in John 15:2 that any branch in Him that doesn't bear fruit is cut away and every branch that bears fruit is cleansed and pruned in order to produce more, richer and more excellent fruit.

“Any branch in Me that does not bear fruit [that stops bearing] He cuts away (trims off, takes away); and He cleanses and repeatedly prunes every branch that continues to bear fruit, to make it bear more, and richer and more excellent fruit.” John 15:2 (Amplified)

As we saw in our opening text, taken from John 15:5, Jesus clearly describes Himself as the True Vine and we, the children of God, as the branches. He further goes on to reveal that if we live in Him and He in us we will bear much abundant fruit, however apart from Him, or whenever we choose to live a life that is not vitally united to Him, we can do nothing.

“I Am the True Vine, you are the branches. Whoever lives in Me and I in him bears much (abundant) fruit. However, apart from Me [cut off from vital union with Me] you can do nothing.” John 15:5 (Amplified)

Jesus, in John 15: 4, also reemphasizes this point when He says:

“Dwell in Me and I will dwell in you. [Live in Me and I will live in you.] Just as no branch can bear fruit of itself without abiding in (being vitally united to) the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me.” John 15:4 (Amplified)

When I read John 15 for the first time it immediately brought to my remembrance my childhood experience with my family's apple tree. Little did I know while I was collecting the broken branches of that tree, as a young boy, that I was living out Jesus' illustration of the vine and the branch through my experience. So when I read that Jesus is the True Vine and that I am simply the branch, I could clearly see how abiding and living in Him was vitally necessary if I desired to live a fruitful life. I easily understood what Jesus meant when He said, as a no branch can bear fruit of itself, neither can we be fruitful, apart from abiding in Him, and living vitally united to Him.

All that came to mind as I read the verses of John 15 were the lifeless branches I collected as a boy and their inability to produce a fruitful harvest, and how their life compared to the fruitful branches that remained united to the vine of the tree. Even at a young age the true power of a branch was revealed to me. I witnessed first hand that in and of itself a branch has absolutely no ability or power to produce anything. It was clear

to me that its only true purpose was to be a vessel from which the life-giving vine of the tree could produce.

This is also our role as children of God, branches connected to the True Vine of Jesus Christ. For like the scripture stated, apart from living and abiding in Christ, we are totally unable and possess no ability to bear fruit in our lives. Our true purpose, like that of the branches of the apple tree of my youth, is to be vessels from which the Life giving Vine of Christ can produce.

Not long ago the Spirit of God gave me a short story that I believe even further illustrates what we are discussing today. Let me briefly share a little bit of it with you.

There was once a young apple tree that had finally reached the age from which it could bear fruit. This apple tree, like all apple trees, was made up of many branches. All of the branches had learned, as they grew with the tree, that they were a family and had to work together as one body in order to be healthy and fruitful. They also had learned how vitally important it was for them to never separate from the Vine of the tree, and were commanded instead to daily give thanks, praise, and honor to the vine for from it flowed all the power of life.

This lesson was well received by all of the branches, all except for one. There was one branch who didn't believe in the Vine and felt that if any one deserved praise for his accomplishments it would be him and him alone. As the season of spring arrived and green leaves began to sprout from the branches of the tree, there arose a shout and praise from all of the branches thanking the Vine for producing the leaves. All except for the one branch, of course, who felt that it was by his own creative ability that his leaf was birthed. As the season progressed soon beautiful flowers began to bud from the branches and once again they all gave praise and honor to the vine for blessing them with the flowers. Yet the self-centered branch, on the other hand, despite the urging of his fellow branches, again refused to honor the vine and took full credit for the flowers produced through him.

Soon after growing frustrated from the constant pressure he received from the others about his ungratefulness toward the Vine, the self-centered branch felt that he would probably fare better living with the flowers in the garden below. The other branches pleaded with him to remain united with the vine but he, because of his lack of faith in the existence of a vine, refused to heed their warning. So one sunny afternoon he broke off of the tree, fell to the ground and rested amongst the flowers of the garden.

At first things went pretty well for him, for his flowers were actually just as beautiful as the ones in the garden. He even began to tease his fellow branches as their flower pedals began to fall and thought they were quite silly for still giving praise to the Vine even when it appeared that they had lost everything. It wasn't long before his flower pedals also began to fall, but he wasn't the least bit worried because he figured that he would just produce some more whenever needed.

One morning he noticed that the branches of the tree were beginning to produce little baby apples. As he listened to their loud chorus, singing songs of praise and honor to the vine, he desperately tried to produce the same and was never able. He spent the remaining seasons of his life, as a lifeless branch lying in a bed of beautiful flowers.

One day the husbandman came to collect his harvest and as he filled his basket with beautiful red apples, he praised the young apple tree for producing such a bountiful harvest. As the husbandman prepared to leave the yard he glanced over at his flowers and noticed a dead branch lying in his flowerbed. He picked it up and with the rest of the trash burned it in the fire.

God gave me this story to help reveal the fact that as men and women, created by God, we have a choice in life to make; to either live as the branches who remained united to the vine, willfully choosing to daily give the True Vine, praise and thanksgiving for all He has blessed us with in life, or we can live as the self-centered branch who thought he could live a fruitful life all on his own. Let us choose to abide, live and dwell in Jesus Christ the True Vine and allow Him to live and dwell in us. Of ourselves, apart from Him we can do nothing. But if we choose to abide vitally united to Him, Jesus promises that we will be those who will produce more, more richer and more excellent fruit in our lives. Jesus said in John 15:8 that:

“When we bear, (produce) much fruit, My Father is honored and glorified, and you show and prove yourselves to be true followers of mine.” John 15:8 (Amplified)

Let's choose to live a life that honors and glorifies our Heavenly Father and prove ourselves to be His true followers, as we daily live and abide in the True Vine, Christ Jesus.