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With clear imagery and repetition, Jesus reveals that the most important factor to our life is to remain, tarry, stay, and continue “in” Christ. Throughout the New Testament we see that union with the Lord Jesus Christ is the gift of God through which He offers all things in this life and in the next. In John 15, Jesus reminds us that the same Gospel that saves us is the Gospel that grows us – abiding in Him. My initial concern and question is “How? How do I remain in Him?” The pragmatist in me wants to cry out “pray, attend worship services, seek justice, tell the world about Jesus.” Those things are good fruit, but this passage is concerned with the root. After all, our effort, morals, and striving didn’t save us in the first place; how can that be the answer to the basis of our relationship with God through Jesus?

In this passage Jesus offers three persons. He is the true vine, with true fruit, and real life. The Father is the vinedresser who freely approaches and works the branches. We are the tender, flexible shoots designed with one purpose – to display the fruit of the vine to the world. God offers us this unique relationship wherein we are intimately united with Jesus, and the Father prunes, cleans, and removes from us undesirable elements.

“To the glory of God the Father” is the aim of God’s Gospel. The presence of fruit glorifies God. The fruit (Fruit of the Spirit, Obedience, Gospel-spreading, Faithful waiting) is the native produce of the true vine, Jesus Christ. As branches we aren’t involved, but we are graciously included. The only root factor that will count and generate lasting results is our union with God’s only begotten Son, Jesus. “Abide in me.”

John 15:2 startles me. Logically I understand that the presence of holy fruit is the marker of a holy root and connection with Jesus. No fruit, no root, cut it off! Additionally God’s freedom to prune, clean, and purify those who remain in Christ as a process to maximize His glory and renown is biblically consistent. I still question though, “What do I need to do in order to be pruned and not cut off?!” The

reason I am startled initially is because v.2 comes before v.3. In an instant Jesus washes over His church, His beloved with a Gospel word: "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."

Each time we open the scriptures we must decide if we are to read by the power of the Gospel or of the Law. The Law is what we do; the Gospel is what God does. Instead of asking "What do I need to DO?" John 15 can first be read by asking "What do I need to BEHOLD that has been done on my behalf?" The Father sent Jesus into this world for impure, unclean, unfruitful people. By God's freedom we are declared clean by Him speaking His word over us. Even though we are found impure, but credited as though clean through our union with the only sinless One, Jesus Christ, God still purifies us over time until we step into His Kingdom.

How then do we remain, tarry, and abide in Christ and Him in us? By the perseverance of God's Spirit in His Son's mighty name and for God's glory. John 15:3 echoes John 3:3, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 3:1-4 – Jesus has not come to enhance our lives, but to replace them. We become new creations, born again. Our longing for God, our yearning for Christ's fruit to be displayed, and our affections for God's glory to be heralded are signs and assurances that we are a truly regenerated people.

God will be glorified and in the end it will not be based on our effort, but on Christ's sufficiency, and His determination that He will have a holy people. We are alive to display His fruit, not ours.

"Therefore, as it is written: 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord'" 1 Corinthians 1:31.

Questions to ponder

How often do you preach the Gospel to yourself – that we are justified by faith in Jesus and not by works?

Where did your desire for God come from?

How have you witnessed God connecting people to Jesus through you? How does God show Jesus to the world through your life?

Are you experiencing God's hand taking parts of you away? Do you trust God to be a good vinedresser? How has God treated you in the past?

If continuing in Christ is up to God's sovereignty and not our effort, how does this motivate us?

I've heard it said "In Jesus, we have our verdict before our performance." What are your thoughts?

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