

**Abiding in Christ:
The Dynamic of Spiritual Growth
John 15:1-17
Sermon Outline**

Introduction: The source of spiritual growth is the Holy Spirit. The context is difficulty. The dynamic is abiding in Christ. Why should we abide in Christ?

I) Because he is the true Israel

A) 15.1: *I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser.*

The back story—Psalm 80, Isaiah 5

Jesus has come to be the Israel that Israel never was.

B) Meaning for us

In Jesus is the place to be if we are to be safely part of God's cosmic renewal plan

Being there is free for those who trust the word of Jesus

The challenge for us: Spiritual growth is not about me

II) Because the Father prunes those who abide in Jesus

A) 15.1-2

What pruning does

B) Meaning for us

Do we want to grow deep?

Not fun ...but good

III) Because the Holy Spirit changes those who abide in Jesus

A) 15.5: *I am the vine and you are the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit*

B) What does the Holy Spirit have to do with this process?

C) Meaning for us

We won't grow spiritually if...

- We are only interested in 'spirituality in general
- We are more interested in the Spirit than in Christ
- We are more interested in being good than in knowing Christ
- We are more interested in getting our theology right than in knowing Christ

IV) Take aways:

- 1) Let God prune you
- 2) Ask the Spirit to make Jesus and the Father pre-eminent.

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) For Jesus to say he is the 'true vine' is to say that he is the true Israel—the Israel that the first Israel failed to be. He does for God's people what we have not and cannot do. What according to 15:3, 15:5, and 15:13 are some of those things? Thank him.
- 2) Reflect on the following: "When we think of spiritual growth we often think narcissistically: growth is about me being happier, me being better, me being more integrated as an individual. But when Jesus thinks and talks about spiritual growth he thinks beyond those things to other things as well—to 'bearing much fruit in God's vineyard'—to being equipped and integrated into what the Father is up to in his renewal of the world. It isn't 'about me.' It's 'about us', and especially 'about God and his glory.'"
- 3) Why do we prune rose bushes? Why does God prune you? What leads him to do it (15.2) and what are the results (15.8)? Remember or share a pruning experience you have had. How did you react to it?
- 4) Jesus does not mention the Holy Spirit in John 15:1-8, but the Holy Spirit is implicit in the metaphor Jesus uses and explicit throughout the larger passage into which John 15 is placed (that is, John 13-17). What role does the Holy Spirit play in the abiding and fruit bearing of God's disciples? Why is his role necessary?
- 5) According to John 14-16, the driving passion of the Holy Spirit is to bring the Father and the Son convincingly, transformingly, and comfortingly into our lives. Review John 14-16 and note all references to the work of the Spirit—both implicit and explicit references. Spend some time thanking the Holy Spirit for the ways in which he has made the Father and the Son real to you.
- 6) When we say that the Spirit's passion is to make the Son and the Father real and vital in our experience, certain things follow: (1) The Holy Spirit is not interested in our culture's fascination with 'spirituality in general;' (2) The Holy Spirit grieves over any Christian theology of the Christian life that obscures Jesus and his work because of a preoccupation with the Spirit and his work; (3) The Holy Spirit grieves when we make being good more important than knowing the Father through the Son; (4) The Holy Spirit grieves when we make getting our theology right more important than knowing the Father through the Son. Where have you tended to grieve the Spirit, given His passion for the glory of the Father and the Son?
- 7) Spend some time asking the Spirit to make the Father and his gift of Jesus more fully the defining narrative of your life.