

## ***Being Christ's Body:*** part 2 – Remaining in Jesus (John 15)

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In Part One, I discussed some of what the Bible says about the body of Christ being made up of different complementary members. This is just one way in which the Bible instructs us about what it means to be a Christian. John 15 teaches us about similar matters but with a slightly different emphasis and with a slightly different image.

In passages like 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 or Romans 12 (to name a few) the emphasis is on the *diversity of gifts* which Christ gives to his *one* church. In John 15:1-14 Jesus speaks of Himself as the vine and of His disciples as branches attached to Him. The branches are meant to be heavy with fruit. The word that Jesus uses to describe being attached to Him is abiding/remaining in Him. He also mentions the Heavenly Father, who He says is the Gardener that judges and refines (prunes/cleans) the branches so that they become more fruitful.

The way in which the Father does this is by the words which Jesus speaks to them. *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you* (v. 3). But Jesus' words are not His own, they are the words of the one who sent Him. Jesus *speaks* the Word of God while at the same time Himself *being* the Word of God. Jesus manifests the Word of God both through His words (spoken) and through His presence (He is the Word of God made flesh).

We should not fear being pruned (cleaned) by the Father. He does this in love and it is not only a necessary part of being a follower of Jesus, but also a joyful part of our discipleship. *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full* (v.11). He prunes us by His Word so that we might be fruitful.

In this passage, Jesus mentions two reasons why God prunes those who are in Jesus: (1) it brings glory to the Father and (2) it proves that you are His disciple. So, far from it being a sign of God's displeasure – when we come in contact with His Word and find ourselves being “taught, reproofed, corrected and trained in righteousness” we should rejoice for this is the work of God in our lives, conforming us into the image of His Son (the Living Word of God).

Perhaps you recognized that I just paraphrased 2 Timothy 3:16. *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness . . .*

The next verse (2 Timothy 3:17) is also applicable (and closely related to what Jesus is saying here). . . . *that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

God does this work in us in order that we might be fruitful (showing the fruit of the Spirit and manifesting good works). One of the emphases of John 15:1-17 is that the only way to bear fruit is by being connected to Jesus. We must abide in Him (another way to translate this is to “remain” in Him). But how do we do this?

*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.* (v. 10) To abide in Jesus is to follow Him and know Him and obey Him just like Jesus followed and obeyed and knows God the Father. (Discipleship is dynamic, not static.) To abide in Jesus is to do the actions of love in imitation of His love.

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 4:31-5:2)*

In John 15:10, Jesus said: *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. The commandment that He gives is to love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends (12b-13).*

We cannot do this simply by means of deciding to do it. As a branch must stay connected to the vine in order to bear fruit, so we must remain connected to Jesus (keeping the connection tight).

It is important to remember that we are all members of the one body of Christ, offering our gifts in service to Him and to each other.

It is also important to remember that it is only by virtue of being connected to the Vine that we have any source of “life” or “power” so as to offer anything at all.

Let us be certain that our first priority is to draw close to Jesus (individually and corporately). It is as He is in us (and we in Him) that we will “be equipped for every good work,” “bear much fruit” and “let our light shine before others (that is, let Jesus shine through us), so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in Heaven.”