

Branch Life - John 15 - Sermon 1 of 5

by Roy Hession

The Christian life is about becoming a branch in Christ, where we are grafted into Him contrary to natural principles, and He imparts His life and nature to us, enabling us to bear fruit and live a life that is characteristic of Him.

Duration: 47:45

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 15:1-8

Topics: "Branch Of Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the parable of the true vine from John chapter 15, verses 1 to 8. Jesus describes himself as the true vine and his father as the vine-dresser. He explains that every branch in him that does not bear fruit will be taken away, while those that do bear fruit will be pruned to bear even more fruit. The speaker emphasizes the importance of abiding in Jesus and allowing his word to abide in us, as this is the key to bearing much fruit and glorifying the Father. The sermon also mentions the believer's relationship with Jesus as that of a bridegroom to a bride, a figure consistently used in the New Testament.

Transcript

Will you turn to John, chapter fifteen, verses one to eight. John, chapter fifteen, verses one to eight. This is a very important parable that Jesus told us, or an allegory if you like, which really gives us the inside story of the Christian life as it really is.

Says Jesus to us, I am the true vine, and my father is the husbandman, or as is sometimes translated the vine dresser. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away. And every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bear more fruit.

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I then will abide in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me.

I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit. For without me ye can do nothing.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered. And men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Herein is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit. So shall ye be my disciples. The believer's relationship to Jesus and his to the believer is given us in the New Testament under three figures.

There may be other figures, but I am thinking of these three outstanding ones. His relationship to us is firstly spoken of as that of the bridegroom to the bride. That is a figure which is used consistently in the New Testament.

Not only in Paul's writings, but in the book of Revelation. I resist the temptation to say several things about that relationship, because it is not our subject in these days. Then we have the figure of the body and the members.

And in the New Testament we get that figure used consistently. Christ is the head, and we are the members of his body. And there too there is much that I am tempted to say.

I am not going to say anything, because that too is not our subject. And then there is a third figure. The relationship of Jesus to the believer is spoken of as that of the vine to the branches.

And this is seen in this beautiful parable or allegory which Jesus spoke. And that is our subject. The believer's relationship to Jesus is that of branch to vine.

And what I want to do, I am going to be benefited, I trust myself as much as any others, I want us to seek to learn to live, as we read in the Scriptures, how to live as branches in Christ. And if you want a title for these studies in the morning, you can entitle it Branch Life. In the last years there has been a great emphasis in the United States, in the churches there, and what is there eventually comes over here too, on the third figure, the church as being the body of which Christ is the head.

And a book has been written which has gone right across the United States, it may be produced in this country, called Body Life. And there were very few ministers into whose study you went and you did not see on his desk a copy of this book, Body Life. And it sought to show how the church can really function as the body of Christ.

And it told the story of how in one particular church they had functioned in just that way, and everybody, other churches seemed hungry to learn more about body life. But our subject is branch life, isn't that an important one? It doesn't mean to say that body life is not important, but our concern is branch life. Our relationship to Jesus is that of branch to bone.

Now I remind you of the very obvious fact that John 15, which contains this parable, is strangely after John 14 and before John 16. And those three chapters are very important ones in John's Gospel, for they are the chapters where Jesus tells his disciples that it is expedient for him to go away. For if he goes not away, the Comforter will not come unto them.

But if he goes back to the Father, he promises he is going to send the third person of the Trinity, the Comforter, in his place. And this is the subject, the place and function of the Holy Spirit since the day of Pentecost, since he went up to heaven, and forty days later there was that great effusion on the believers of the dear Holy Spirit. Someone has suggested there are three dispensations.

There is the dispensation of the Father, which you get in the Old Testament, where God's seat was in heaven, and he worked from heaven to men on earth. Then in the Gospels you've got the dispensation of the Son, and God has found another seat from which to work now, the incarnated Son of God, and he wrought on earth through his Son. But with his going back to glory and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we've been since then living in the third dispensation, the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

And here God's found yet another seat from which to work, not from heaven, not from the person of the Son, for he's visibly here no longer. His new seat is the believer, in whom this Holy Spirit has come to dwell, and from whom he moves out. And this is a wonderful dispensation to live in, the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

It's a dispensation in which Jesus is more glorious than he ever was in the second one, for in the second he was only localized in one place at a time. But now he's everywhere known and worshipped, and the Holy Spirit has come to make him real and present to us. And Jesus in chapters 14, 15 and 16 is preparing his disciples for this immense change in relationship to himself, which will take place when he's returned to the Father and the Spirit has come, and he's telling them, it's going to be better, you're going to know me in a way that was impossible for you to know me while I was with you.

And three times in these chapters you have Jesus talk, saying, at that day, at that day, and that day is Pentecost onwards, and he wants to tell them of the new relationship with himself, which will obtain in this day of grace, in this day of the Holy Spirit, where Jesus is more known and not nearer, more available than he ever was in prior dispensations. And right in the middle of these three chapters you get this parable as a vivid illustration what the relationship with him will be in this day. No longer will he and we be different persons, but as he says in 14, verse 20, at that day ye shall know I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

What a glorious advance on anything the disciples knew. And in order that we might understand it, he gives us this simple illustration of the vine and the branches. It is meant to illustrate for us life in the Spirit, knowing Jesus no longer after the flesh as they did in the Gospels, but now in the Spirit.

And this is the day in which you and I live. And it shows us how it works out. Again, I say then, the picture is, our relationship now is what it never could have been before.

Our relationship to Jesus is that of branch to vine. Now our first subject this morning is becoming a branch, for man wasn't always a branch in Christ. If you like, you can call it becoming a Christian, because that's what a true Christian is.

He is nothing less than a branch in Christ. That man was once a branch in Adam. He drew his life from Adamic stock, which was sinful stock, fallen stock, egocentric stock, that unhappy race that descended from Adam.

And being a branch in Adam, he partook of the fallen life and sinful nature of Adam. And he brought for our fruit. And quite obviously, a branch bears fruit which is characteristic of the parent stock.

And the fruit that we've all borne has been sadly characteristic of Adam. We've lived Adam's life again and again. We've repeated times without number his sin in the garden.

But grace has done a new work in many of our hearts. And what has happened is this. You've been taken out of that old stock and you have been grafted into the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know what grafting is. A branch taken out of one stock and grafted into another. And you and I, if we believed and received Jesus Christ as Saviour, had been not only made near him, we've been grafted into him, just as a branch is grafted into another stock.

And then, thereafter, draws its life and draws its nourishment from that new stock. And being grafted into Christ as branches, we partake of the root and fatness of Jesus, the vine. And the fruit that is borne is characteristic of the one in whom we are branches.

Now Paul has something to say about this grafting. I turn you to Romans 11, 24. He's actually talking about a subject slightly different.

And he's talking about an olive tree rather than a vine. But the principle of grafting is clear. Romans 11, 24, we break into his argument, For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, etc., etc.

Cut out of the wild olive tree, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree. And the thing that I want to emphasise is that word contrary to nature. Because that which has happened to us is contrary to nature.

It owes nothing to merely natural influences and natural principles. What's happened to me, I tell you, is something contrary to nature. I certainly had few beneficent influences that might have led me by their own power to know Jesus Christ.

I wasn't brought up in a Christian home. Our family didn't go to church. Our family cared nothing for the things of God.

And if God hadn't taken the initiative, nothing would have happened spiritually. It was something contrary to nature. It couldn't be accounted for on natural grounds.

True, my cousin, an officer in the Navy, was led to Christ. True, he prayed for us. True, he arranged for me and my brother to come, if you please, to Southwold.

In 1926, some of you weren't even born then, and there Joe Church had his boys' house parties somewhere down on the front. We joined in with the CS's and services. And there I was grafted contrary to nature into Jesus Christ.

Now this is important for you to understand this. It's so easy to imagine that people become Christians, branches in Christ, by natural principles. I mean, you might say, well, all is well with me, had not I had a good Christian home? Has not my dad and granddad, had they all not been devout believers? Have I not joined the church? Have I not heard the word? Do I not attend communion? Am I not an officer or in some such position in the church? Feeling that all these things will make us Christians, I want to tell you it is not so.

I never had them, countless haven't had them, and yet something contrary to nature has happened to us. And unless something contrary to nature has happened to you, unless something has happened to you which cannot be accounted for by natural principles, you're not yet a branch in Christ. It's so easy, especially biographers, when they write of the life of somebody or other, or commentators, when they write of a Bible character, like David, oh they're quite sure that he was chosen to be king because he was such a devout boy keeping his sheep.

He looked at the stars and wrote his psalms, he didn't write them at that early stage I don't think. And he was such a devout boy, I tell you David was chosen of God altogether contrary to nature. There were perhaps lots of other young men who were even more devout than he, but they weren't selected.

If there was devoutness it didn't help him, and lack of it didn't hinder him. Something altogether of grace, something contrary to nature. Now this dies hard, this dies hard, because if you are what you are because of the Christian life, because of your Christian home or beneficent influences, then you've got a head start on a whole lot of people who have none of those things, and maybe will never catch up with you.

If the Christian life is the product of good natural influences, then Peter, who accompanied with Jesus Christ for three years, had a head start on Paul. Paul didn't accompany with Jesus, he was the church's bitterest foe. But in the event we find that Peter had no head start at all, he was, I would say, don't you think that he was ahead in experience of God in the gospel than even Peter? And what happened to Saul of Tarsus was something contrary to nature.

It's a wonderful thing when grace takes wholly the initiative, and he can pass by those that seem well-equipped and constitutionally inclined that way, who perhaps are doing their bit in their service as sidesmen or on the church council, and he lays hold of someone who's got nothing like that in their favor, if necessary, takes them out of that old stock of Adam, and he plants them, grafts them into Jesus Christ as branches in the vine. Now, this picture of the vine and the branches really shows us what a true Christian is. It's one of his own choice, this picture, and it's so deep and all-inclusive.

It tells us, first, that a true Christian is one who is joined to Christ. As I've said, he wasn't always anything but, but something beautiful's taken place in his life, and now he's joined to Christ as much a part of Jesus as the branch is of the vine. A Christian is not merely someone who's had their sins forgiven.

He's not merely someone who has been promised eternal life and guaranteed a place in heaven, rather than heading for hell. It's something much more than that. He is a person who is being joined to Jesus Christ.

As it says in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians somewhere, he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, nothing less than that. An old hymn says, my soul is now united to Christ the living vine, his love I once had I did, but now I know him and feel him, and just as in the other figures the emphasis is on union, man and wife become one flesh, body and members, head and members are one body, so vine and branch are one. Nothing less is a believer, and if that isn't your assurance, consciously, you may well doubt where in the world you've got to yet, perhaps the initial grafting has never yet taken place.

Well, how do you get it to take place? Just tell him, Lord, I'm not yet a branch. You don't need to ask him to make you a branch, just tell him you're not, and you become a candidate for grace. I tell you, when a man says, you know, I'm not a real Christian then, dear friend, you're nearly home and dry.

It's taken you a long time to confess it. I beg you, say, I cannot really say, my soul is now united to Christ the living vine. Nothing contrary to nature has yet taken place.

That's the way for it to happen, so quickly, so readily. All right then, this, as I said, gives us a true picture of the true Christian. First, he's one who's joined to Christ.

Secondly, that branch which is now grafted into Christ partakes of the root and fatness and sap of the vine. Not only is that branch in the vine, but the sap of the vine is in the branch. It doesn't have to expect to

have in itself the necessary qualities for the Christian life, for fruit-bearing.

It finds all that it needs in the vine which, by the Holy Spirit, is in him. There's a chorus we used to sing years ago, very popular, popularized years ago by Gypsy Smith, let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me, all his wonderful love and purity. O thou spirit divine, all my nature refined, till the beauty of Jesus is seen in me.

Well, it was a beautiful chorus and it had a nice sentiment about it. It wasn't really quite true, correct, theologically. The spirit divine does not improve your nature, but he imparts his.

You're not expected to have your nature improved. I can't say the old Roy Heston has done any improving over these years. It's an old Adamic nature and when it acts, it acts like Adam did.

But what the possibility is to have the nature, the life of the vine, more deeply and ever more fully imparted to you. And so we used to change that chorus, O thou spirit divine, make all his nature mine. And if you're working on the nature of the branch by itself, you're on a thankless task.

You won't find any success that way by means of resolutions and promises and much prayer. It'll be the same old nature that it inherited from Adam, but you've been grafted into Christ and the life of the vine is in the branch. And the whole beautiful secret is that I don't have to find it in myself.

I count on that Jesus in whom all fullness is, who tells me I'm joined to him and he is in me. Just as the branch is to the vine, we say, I'm joined to Christ. I know he's mine, I know he's mine, this friend so dear, he lives in me, he's ever near.

Ten thousand charms around him shine, but best of all, I know he and his life is mine and nothing less is a Christian. And what we want to do is to learn together more of this branch life, which ceases to think of finding something worthwhile in ourselves, that writes ourselves off as the source of the Christian life, sees us only as those in Jesus who are partakers of the divine nature, not imitators, but partakers of the divine nature. Then this picture of the vine and branches, it tells us not only we're joined to Christ, nor only that we're partakers of the root and fatness of Christ, the vine, but it makes so clear that the whole purpose of this great procedure is grace, of grace, is that the branch should bear the fruit of the vine.

We haven't got to produce the fruit, we've simply got to bear what the vine produces. Please turn the cassette over now, do not fast wind it in either direction. We've simply got to bear what the vine produces.

If it is true, as we shall see in later studies, that apart from the vine the branch could do nothing, it is also true that apart from the branch the vine can do nothing. That may need some qualification, but you see the point. The vine must have some branches, and what's his intention in grafting us into himself that he might have branches that should bear his fruit on earth.

He'll do the producing, he who lives in us, but we've got to be available to him as branches to bear, not our hard won fruit, but his. And the fruit which a branch bears is always characteristic of the parent stock into which it is grafted. That's what James says in chapter three, verse twelve.

James three, verse twelve. Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive trees? No, a fig tree can only bear figs. And he goes on to say, either a vine figs, does a vine produce figs? No, a vine produces only that which is characteristic of itself.

And that's grapes. And if I'm put in Christ and am there to bear his fruit, that fruit is going to be simply characteristic of Jesus. And fruit is something visible and tasteable, and others get the taste of it, and they taste Jesus.

On that fruit, that is to be born on our branch. So often it's the last thing that's produced. Some of the things that come out of my life are not characteristic of Jesus, they're characteristics of fallen me.

But I want to tell you of this glorious possibility of grace, he can so work in our hearts and teach us what branch life really is, that that fruit which is born on our branch will be characteristic of love, patience, boldness, freedom, victory, which is only characteristic of Jesus. And this fruit is not merely for our comfort, it's supremely for other people. We should look at that more.

It's for others! The vine doesn't bring forth the grapes for its own consumption, it's for others. And the great concern of Jesus, the vine is for others, but how is he going to reach others, how are they going to see what he is, save as he has branches grafted into him, in whom he dwells, and who bring forth his fruit. Indeed, this fruit is the evidence that you've been grafted into Christ, and Christ lives in you.

And it could well be there isn't any special evidence, and it may be something's not really quite happened, or if you've been grafted in, you've not remained where grace puts you, which is what abiding in Christ means. That too we shall be looking at. Let's tell ourselves that the whole purpose of a branch is to bring forth his fruit.

And if we're failing there, we're failing of the whole purpose of our salvation. And God has no secondary use for a branch which isn't doing that. This is brought out in a little-known passage along this line in Ezekiel 15.

We've been looking at John 15, well, the Old Testament counterpart could be regarded as Ezekiel 15. And there we have the words. And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Some a man, what is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereof? Behold, it is cast into the fire for few.

And it is a fact. There's no secondary use for vinewood. If it isn't producing grapes, it's got no other purpose.

You can't make something of it. You can't even make a pig. It's such poor stuff, it's designed for one reason only, to bring forth grapes, the grapes of the parent vine.

And if it isn't doing that, there's only one thing for it, but to be cast into the fire and burnt. And we need to tell ourselves there's no secondary purpose for a man, be he never so religious, who's not a branch in Christ, and bringing forth some measure of fruit. Some people say, well, I can always help with the tea, I'm not really through yet, but don't do much.

And I'm on the PCC, I've got a bit of use there, surely? Yes, very often it's the wrong use, those PCCs and other church bodies, terrible. It's usually the wrong people that get on, and we don't get the fruits of the Spirit there. But alas, too often the bitter, contentious works of the flesh.

What other secondary use are you comforting yourself with that, you know, really justifies your existence in the church? I want to tell you, Jesus makes nothing of those things. He'd rather have a new convert

who's bubbling over with Jesus, than some official, some senior member who's on this committee, on that board, or an office bearer. You are designed for one thing only, just this.

And Jesus makes nothing of it, of anything else, no secondary use. And if you're cold and out of touch, there's nothing you can do to please God, save get back to that vine in whom you've ceased to abide, or confession never even being grafted into Him. It's pretty solemn.

Nothing for it, but to be cast out and into the fire. So my dear friends, this is important. Some of you may know Colonel Sherl Cooper, he is England's premier horticulturist.

Many of you who are keen gardeners will have read some of his articles, and know something of the horticultural theories, which he is demonstrating in his beautiful grounds near Hatfield, and which he writes about. And I've been out there, and he said to me, he said, you know, Roy, he said, I'm nothing special, I'm just a hallelujah Christian. Full of joy, full of praise.

Maybe it isn't, you may not ever be given to shout hallelujah, but you can be a hallelujah Christian nonetheless. That's the only thing that matters. Full of Christ, full of peace, full of care for the other man.

Rejoicing in the God of your salvation, all the other things you do just can't count for anything, and don't mean in themselves anything at all as to our spiritual state. But of course, this bringing forth fruit, and we'll go into details a little further about what it really is, these evidences that cannot be hidden of Jesus in the life, are only possible as an ongoing experience, as we abide in the vine into which grace has planted us. Now I'm bothered about this word abide.

Amongst those that go to conventions, it's become all too often a rather empty cliché. Someone said to me, the secret's in abiding. I didn't know what he meant.

I thought the secret was in Christ. Oh no, it's apparent in abiding. And it's got all sorts of, to me, difficult connotations.

Now this word abide simply means, from the Greek, remain. Sometimes in some places the Greek word translated abide is translated elsewhere, remain. Many places it's translated dwell.

In other places, continue. And abiding is really a non-current word. Usually I'm a great lover of the authorised version, and I like those words as they are.

And if a word is a bit obscure, like this one, then I take great joy in trying to explain it. But I still like to think it's this old version that I'm trying to elucidate. It does need some elucidation, no one would deny that.

But it has such great advantages which I needn't mention. Now I also love, and have found help, from the revised standard version. And this professes to be the version that gives current, modern English words.

And why the dickens don't they do it? I find that so often our versions change words that don't need to be changed, and fail to change words that do need to be changed. But the revised standard version still uses this rather vague word, abiding. Well, no translation is perfect, and of course the authorised version isn't perfect either.

That's the reason why you've become to be a student of the word. You need what helps you can find, that give you the more accurate reading. Because accuracy is the one thing the devout student of the scriptures must pursue.

He may not necessarily quote it this way, but his own study. And I have suffered the great initial lack of never having studied classics of school only, modern languages. Oh, I did my usual stint of Latin, but we never touched Greek.

Oh, I would have done anything to have done a little Greek. But I found a wonderful help in Jung's analytical concordance. And this is his that tells me, the same word translated abide is often translated dwell, sometimes remain, sometimes continue.

Well, what we're getting at is what is the meaning of it here. Abide in me, remain where grace has put you. You have been put in Christ, granted in Christ.

And as I remain, and we shall have to think what that means, in our study of branch life, remaining where grace puts me, counting on my union with Christ, repenting of that which would disturb it, and it does, being cleansed of that which would diminish the life of Christ in me. As I go on doing that, that that which is the purpose of my salvation cannot but take place. It's not the responsibility of the vine to be concerned about fruit, simply his relationship with the source of it all, and or what fruit is born.

And though I know we often have to head people off saying the fruit of the Spirit are only those ninefold qualities in Galatians 5, less people should be incited to struggle to win souls. On the other hand, we have to admit, as someone has said, that in so often, according to the will of God, the fruit of a Christian is another Christian. It can't but happen.

And the people of whom this is true aren't struggling about witnessing, are not blaming themselves when they don't seem to make it, it just happens, they're just full of Jesus. And around such people, things happen. There are these primary fruits, but there's this other.

I was hearing of a church represented here, of which the pastor is one of our team who cannot be here this week, and she told me the most lovely thing has happened. People are being saved and those who are winning souls are the new converts. They're just being, they are being a branch in Christ, they are in the enjoyment of the root and fatness, and it's those who haven't learnt to get themselves under law about it who are seeing the fruit.

And the evangelistic outreach in that church is not done by organisation, it's simply the life of the vine in the branch, and beautiful to say, in those new branches, they've got no great experience to point to, they've only got Jesus, and that's how he wanted it to be with us all the time, that we get old and on and we devise ways and means and put ourselves under law and struggle away, but that's not how it's intended. The fruit of the vine in the branch, as that branch remains, is concerned that its relationship with this lovely Lord Jesus goes on, and many adjustments to be made of course, the basic union is never changed, but somehow we can get somewhat out of touch because of sin and self, the autodidamic nature, don't always judge it quickly, I know of course this aspect of things isn't contained in the parable of the vine and the branches because no parable can give the whole truth, but it's as we know it in our experience. So there then is our first look at this parable, our subject is branch life, and we've been thinking perhaps especially about becoming a branch and what it really means, and you've got to ask yourself, has something contrary to nature brought me to Jesus and grafted me in? Well, how do I come? I just confess you haven't got it friend, I don't know I can tell you anything else, and you won't be confessing that things aren't well with your soul before Jesus will come, and you'll know he has taken you and put you there, but that's the way, you always come into the negative, at least I seem to, through confessing them, I come into the positive through confessing the negative.

So may God grant that we shall really begin on this new life, and it's so different from anything else, branch life, let us pray. Lord Jesus we thank you, thou art the true life giving thine, and Lord when we sung that hymn it helped me, I found myself addressing thee thyself and calling thee thou true life giving thine. We know our emptiness, thank you Lord that branches don't have to be anything but weak and helpless and empty, all the life's in thee, and we address thee this morning, thou true life giving thine, let me thy sweetness prove, and Lord if any might be in doubt as to whether they have been contrary to nature, grafted into thee, help such to tell thee so.

Oh we thank thee for the simplicity of the way of grace, and we thank you, you delight to round to those who confess their lacks, that they're not there, and teach us more in these days together, about this extraordinary thing, branch life, for thy name's sake, Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/16/SID16769.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/roy-hession/branch-life-john-15-sermon-1-of-5/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net