

REMAIN IN ME!

John 15:1-10
Key Verse 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Thanks be to God for teaching us the nature and work of the Holy Spirit through the last Sunday message. Jesus promised us that he will send us the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, who reminds us of his words and helps us to overcome all sufferings, temptations and disappointments on our journey of faith in order to fulfil God's mission. May God help us to experience the assistance of the Holy Spirit again and again through our practical love for Jesus, namely through our obedience to his word, and thereby fulfil our mission entrusted by God.

Today Jesus wants to help us reflect on our relationship with him. He teaches us that it is absolutely necessary that we remain in him, in his love and in his word, in order to produce many good fruits through our life for God. Without Jesus, we cannot bring forth good fruits of life for God and will eventually be cast into eternal damnation on Judgment Day. Let us humbly acknowledge our total dependence on Jesus and thank Him with all our heart for His love.

1. I am the true vine (1.2)

Let us look at verse 1. Let's read this verse together, please: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." God desired that the Israelites would bring forth good fruit. But the vine of Israel spoiled and brought forth only rotten fruit. Therefore,

God sent his only Son Jesus to fulfil God's plan for Israel and for the whole world.

Despite this wonderful love of God for us unfaithful human beings, his creatures, many godless people think that they themselves are the master of their lives. But it is ignorant and arrogant towards God for anyone to think that they can live autonomously in this world with their own wisdom and power. But in John chapter 15 Jesus teaches us that from God's point of view we human beings cannot do everything independently and autonomously. Jesus says that he is the vine and we are the branches, and that without him we can do nothing. Let us learn below what he means more specifically by this.

Let us look at verse 2. Let us also read it together, please: "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." "Oh, that's harsh!" many may think here. But it is not the vines that decide what happens to them, it is the husbandman who decides this. God decides what happens to the ungodly and unfruitful branches on Jesus' vine because he is their Creator.

God said to them in Genesis 1:28a after He created human beings, "God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." God's will and blessing for all people is to bear much fruit for our Creator. In doing so, God is pleased and honoured. In this passage we learn that our Lord Jesus wanted his

disciples to produce much fruit for God through their lives, especially through their relationship with Jesus. Jesus repeated his statement about bearing fruit eight times in this chapter. This shows how important it was for Jesus to make this clear to his disciples.

But fruit does not come just like that. But in order to bear fruit, we have to learn some principles that have to be followed. Jesus explains this with an example from nature, namely vine-growing. In order to bring forth good fruit, useless vines must first be cut off. On a vine there are two kinds of branches, good and bad. Bad branches should be cut off because bad branches are a home for worms, aphids and other pests. If the bad branch is not removed, the pests multiply and also destroy the good branches and eventually the grapes on them. In addition, bad branches take a lot of nutrients away from good branches. That is why gardeners prune their vines every year. They cut off the dead branches so that the living ones will yield all the more.

The fruit-bearing vines can be compared to spiritually fruit-bearing people. But to our surprise, Jesus says that even these spiritually fruitful people are to be pruned so that they can bear even more fruit for God. This principle applies spiritually to all people. Circumcision causes pain and discomfort at first. But we must not avoid spiritual circumcision out of worry or fear, otherwise we become useless and fruitless for God. That is the spiritual reality.

How then does God circumcise us human beings so that we can bear more fruit for him? He does this first and foremost through his word. God had once given his people Israel the 10 Commandments to raise them up to be his people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Through the 10 Commandments he wanted to circumcise them and help them to live in right relationship with God and with their fellow human beings. But because of their sinful nature, the Israelites could not follow this absolutely and meet God's standard. So he sent his

dear, only Son, and had him crucified for our guilt of sin on the cross of Calvary, in order to help us to be able to live in right relationship with God and with our fellow human beings through him after all. May God help us to be humble before Jesus, the true vine, and before God, our Creator, and to let them circumcise us through their words. The goal of our pruning by God's Word is that we bear more fruit for God.

The goal of the Factual Bible study, the GLEF, the Leadership Master Course and our testimony writing, among others, is our inner and outer circumcision by the Word of God so that we can thereby bear more fruit for God and grow into good branches on the vine of Jesus. In order for us to be successfully circumcised by God's Word, we must be humble and repentant before the Word of God. Our circumcision by God's Word is often painful, sometimes uncomfortable because our sin is revealed, and often it is protracted. But when we allow ourselves to be circumcised by God, the fruit that delights and honours God grows from it.

When our baptised people let themselves be circumcised by God through the intensive Bible study in preparation for their baptism, through the Daily Bread Training, through the GLEF and through their regular testimony campaign, they became spiritually mature and were allowed to experience the spiritual change in their lives in various ways. They were already able to independently prepare questionnaires for Bible study, give encouraging talks about predecessors in faith in church and also be a good role model for their classmates at school.

Now let us think about fruit. In nature today, plants are often sprayed, doped so to speak, to make them look especially big and beautiful. For example, apple orchards are usually sprayed so that beetles or other vermin don't attack the apples and they don't have many holes and look funny afterwards. But such a procedure is not honest with the end consumer who buys the apples in the shop. This does not work with

God. We cannot pretend to God that we have good fruit, neither internal nor external, because everything of ours is revealed before God.

So what does it mean to bear good fruit for God? To bear good fruit, from God's perspective, is to be understood in two ways. First, good fruit refers to the inner change and growth of a person. More specifically, it is about the fruits of the Holy Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22, 23a: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

St. Augustine, who lived 354-430 AD, liked to be a religious man. That is why he joined the Manichaeans, who lived an extremely ascetic life. But he could not get his lust problem solved by his own efforts. One day he read Romans 13:13,14: "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." These words of Paul not only touched Augustine's heart, but they also knocked loudly on his soul, urging him to no longer give in to his lust. With holy fear he converted and from then on lived no longer for his own pleasure but for the glory of God, thus becoming good fruit.

Secondly, good fruit for God can also be good external fruit e.g., winning people for Jesus and raising them as disciples of Jesus. When we look at the messianic work of Jesus, besides his death on the cross and his resurrection, Jesus put the emphasis of his earthly work on educating his twelve disciples. As disciples of Jesus, we are also to raise up disciples of Jesus in our lives. This is how God spreads his work of salvation. Jesus also taught this to his disciples in his Great Commission in Matthew 28:19,20 before his ascension. And Jesus also taught this to Peter, for example, when he visited him again after his resurrection and gave him direction to feed his sheep

(John 21:15). Let us raise up disciples of Jesus at all faculties of the University of Bonn, as well as at the Rhine-Sieg University of Applied Sciences, the University of Koblenz and other universities in Germany and Europe and wherever God leads us, and thus please God. Let us continue to pray that God will raise up 1 Abraham and 1 Sarah of faith and 12 disciples of Jesus through us wherever He has raised us up. However, it is not as easy as it reads or sounds to bear much inner and outer fruit for God. But Jesus teaches us how to do this in the following verses.

2. Remain in me, and I will remain in you (3-10)

Let's look at verses 3 and 4. Let's read these verses together too, please: "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." In these 10 verses, the word "remain" is repeated ten times. Why does Jesus' repeat "remain" so many times? We can better understand the meaning of "remain" by reflecting on some Bible verses. In Psalm 1:1-3 the Psalmist says: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

Psalm 119:10,11 says, "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." - Those who want to remain in Jesus must keep God's word in their soul. Psalm 119:20 says, "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times." Many of us like to read interesting, informative books. But we should not read the Bible the way we read other books. We need to explore the Bible

until God's Word speaks to us personally and takes hold of our souls. - Then we can remain in Jesus with the Word of God. Colossians 3:16 says, " Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

It is unlikely that God's Word will remain in us and take hold of us if we hear it once a week at Sunday service, then once more a week when preparing for Bible study, and then once more at Bible study itself, and perhaps once more a week when writing testimonies. From my own experience I can say that this is not enough for Jesus' word to really take hold of our souls and drive us to act on it practically. - Was this then due to God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit? Or was it due to my difficult conditions, because I work full time and also in shifts? No, surely it was not due to any of these points, but it was due to myself. My desire for the Word of God was simply too weak. My desire for it was only lukewarm instead of studying it with great desire. I thank Jesus for encouraging me here to renew my desire for God's Word. To look at God's Word with a burning spirit and desire requires dedication, spiritual warfare and prayer. - Is this then impossible for us who work full time? Certainly not. Even if we are tired after work and more often at our physical limit, we can fight this battle. Sh. Peter, Sh. Jochen, Sh. Warmherz or even M. Peter are examples of how we can take Jesus' word deeply into us and obey it through regular personal engagement with it, even if we work full time. Let us study Jesus' word with great desire and with the burning spirit to be taken by it and to obey it practically. Amen.

Whether we can produce good fruit in our lives does not depend on our ability or performance, but on our abiding in Jesus. If we remain faithful in Jesus and in his Word and deepen our love relationship with him more and more, then we will be able to produce many good fruits of life for the glory of God. Let us look at verses 5 and 6. We would also like to read these verses together,

please: " I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned." Jesus says, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" What a wonderful promise of God that is! But whoever does not remain in Jesus will be thrown away and even burned. This is a serious warning from Jesus. The burnt branches are those who have lost their salvation. This includes those who belong to Jesus outwardly but are spiritually dead because they have no life relationship with Jesus, such as Judas Iscariot. - It is very important that we always remember that Jesus desires us to remain in Him and produce much fruit. This is the purpose God has given us for our lives.

If a person does not remain in the life relationship with Jesus, then he is like a vine without roots. But without roots, the vine cannot survive. The roots of the vine are normally 20-50 cm below the ground. A vine has very many roots and is thus firmly anchored to the ground. Some vines in softer soils have roots that reach even up to 15 metres into the earth. That is several metres deeper than a normal family house is high. Through the roots, the vine receives everything it needs from the soil, such as water and nutrients, to produce lots of fruit. - Just as the connection of the roots with the vine and the branches is necessary and crucial for the branches to grow and survive, so too is our connection with Jesus, the true vine, necessary and crucial for us. Without Jesus we wither spiritually and will miss out on eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we must firmly plant the roots of our life in Jesus and develop a deep love and life relationship with Him. We can do this by taking Jesus' words into our hearts and holding them there. Jesus himself, or the Holy Spirit, helps us to do this by reminding us again and again of Jesus' words.

A woman once had no roots of life in Jesus. When she built her life on her human desire

for a man's love and approval, she became suspicious, miserable and sad. But when she repented of her false worship and put her life roots in Jesus and in the Word of Jesus, especially John 4:26 where Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." she was changed into a disciple of Jesus and a mother of faith to her people and used as a blessing to many others. In Jesus she was able to bring forth many good fruits of life for the joy of God.

Let us look at verses 7 and 8. Let us also read these verses together, please: " If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." There are many Christians who want to do something great for God. But in fact, very few experience the power of God and glorify God. God's work is not done by calculating thoughts, nor by our own power. - We need to learn how to pray. We must have clear prayer requests according to God's will and persevere in coming to God with them. Then God will surely hear us in His time and give us fruit.

To remain in Jesus and in His love, we must also learn how to obey God's commands. Let us read verses 9 and 10, please: " As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." - First, Jesus speaks here of "loving". As God loves his dear Son Jesus, so Jesus loves us, absolutely and unconditionally. For this we are to thank him with all our heart and love him too. Jesus also calls us here, "remain in my love!" He goes on to say, " If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." - In short, we can show our love for Jesus by obeying him as he obeyed God.

If we love him, then we want to keep his commandments. If we love Jesus, then we do not "have" to keep his commandments,

but then we "want" to keep his commandments. This is how we can express our love for him. For example, we want to obey Jesus' command "Feed my sheep!" because we love Jesus.

Nowadays, most people, especially young people, are reluctant to obey parents, superiors at work or others because they want to be in control of their own lives. That is why many move away from home early. Many young people choose to be self-employed. They do not want to obey their parents' advice on what to study or what profession to pursue. They want to decide for themselves where to live and what to do with their time and money. And they certainly do not want to obey God or Jesus, because they think that this would make them unfree and unhappy. In reality, however, their life without Jesus or without God leads them deeper and deeper into a life addicted to self and pleasure and enslaved by sin, whereby they only distance themselves more and more from God. But what they underestimate is the serious consequence of their godless life, that God will judge them on the Last Day and cast them into the fiery lake of hell. God taught the Israelites the obedience of faith in the wilderness by giving them daily bread training for 40 years. Every early morning they were to get up and go out into the desert and gather their bread for that day. By doing this, God helped them to obey God's instruction, love Him and eventually develop a firm life relationship with God. This enabled them to live fruitful lives as God's people and royal priesthood, pleasing God. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Although He is the Son of God, He obeyed God with all His heart and with all His strength, even though this obedience was often very painful for Him. Hebrews 5:8,9 says about Jesus: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

Without obedience to Jesus' commands, we cannot remain in His love or in Him. Let us learn humble obedience and first obey Je-

sus' command to "Love one another!" and thus build the church of God. Let us learn to obey God through Daily Bread training and obeying our common yearly key words from Nehemiah 2:17 and Ezekiel 37:10 and thus remain in Jesus and His love. Let us also help our children and Bible students to remain in Jesus and in His love by believing in His love and obeying His commandments. This will also enable them to work wholeheartedly for the spiritual reconstruction of Germany and Europe.

Today we have learned that we are branches in the vine of Jesus and we can do nothing without him. Therefore, it is necessary to remain in him and in his love. Out of love for Jesus, let us keep his commandments and bear much inner and outer fruit for his joy.

Let us conclude by reading Jesus' words from verse 5 together again: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."