

## John 77 – Abide in Me

02/15/2026

### **Scripture 1: (John 15:1-12 ESV)**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

### **Scripture 2: (Rom. 11:11-24 ESV)**

So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.

Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.

Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

## Sermon:

Proclaiming, “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*”, Jesus declared a message about God's transcendent Sovereignty. He proclaimed how God is Sovereign over our election, whether unto salvation (by being grafted into the vine of Christ) or unto reprobation (by being cut off and taken away) {the doctrine of double-predestination}.

When Jesus said, “*I am the true vine...*”, He claimed to be the “true Israel”, and when He said “*...my Father is the vinedresser.*”, He claimed that God the Father is the One who plants, cultivates, and provides for Israel. Jesus was saying that Israel has received all of its many blessings through God's grace alone, directly from the LORD's providential hand. God the Father, in His role of “*vinedresser*”, chooses and then grafts the branches of His choice in from other vines, so that they may be used for the good. He prunes these branches that are growing on the vine (both the natural and those grafted in), so that they may grow stronger, more healthy, and produce an abundance of “good fruit”. Likewise, He trims and cuts off all of the “dead wood”; branches that only consume and do not produce; branches that have become hard, dry, and brittle; branches that are valueless except as fuel for the fire.

This image of Jesus as “the true vine”, and God as “the vinedresser” may be used to help us generate a relational picture of some of the different roles that belong to each of the Three Persons of the Trinity. {Please note that this is not an expression of the heresy modalism (which implies that each Person is defined and limited by their role), instead, these roles merely describe part of how each Person engages and works with the others in the divine work of redemption.}

- God the Father, as “*the vinedresser*”, elects and predestines every branch which shall ever belong to the vine. He is the Person who cuts them away from their prior vine of death and destruction, the “*vine of Sodom*” (Deut. 32:32 ESV), and grafts each one onto the “*true vine*” of Jesus Christ; thereby giving them to His Son (John 10:28-29).

He is the Person who “*prunes*” them. He declares them to be Holy. He sanctifies them by removing their sin. He removes whatever is bad and harmful; whatever might hinder them from bearing “*good fruit*”.

- God the Son, Jesus Christ, as “*the vine*”, is the Person who receives and holds onto all of the many branches that the Father gives to Him. He is united to them, just as they are united to Him. He supports them and upholds them. He gives them purpose, direction, and meaning. He turns the branches upwards to face the sun.
- God the Holy Spirit, our *paraklete*, He is the Person who delivers these chosen branches to the Son and He is the Person who applies the life of Jesus Christ to those branches. He regenerates them (John 3:3) and brings them to a life (2 Corinthians 3:5-6) that they never could have known while being still a part of their old branch. He, as our other *paraklete*, is the Person who fills them, feeds them, strengthens them, and encourages them with the power and strength of the vine, which is Christ.

That image should be absolutely beautiful to everyone who loves Christ and it should be incredibly terrifying to everyone who hates God. This image describes how, by God's mercy and grace, some of those who were dead, now live, while others, in God's just judgment and wrath, are condemned and continue to remain destined for destruction. Each of us, who loves Christ, should rejoice at the good providence of our being chosen through no justifying cause of our own because we are now grafted into the true, living vine. Meanwhile, all those who hate God should despair because the time of their doom is fast approaching and the righteous punishment that they deserve for their wickedness is certain and sure, and it shall not be commuted.

Now, understanding Jesus as “*the true vine*” has several important implications for our faith concerning what we believe and how we should respond to it. The first implication reminds us of our dependence on God for everything alongside our lack of desire and incapacity to save ourselves; our inability to do anything to justify our deliverance.

- Can a leafy branch transplant itself? Can it cut itself off of one plant, move itself, and then graft itself into another plant?
  - No, of course not!
- Can a leafy branch prune itself? Can it choose to have certain particular leaves or shoots fall off, so that others might receive a greater portion of limited resources?
  - No, of course not!

Every domestic and cultivated plant and vine needs someone separate, someone that is outside and above themselves, to tend and to take care of them. Every vine needs a transcendent “*vinedresser*” who is able and willing to do everything necessary so that they may grow well; so that they may grow healthy, strong, and productive. This “*vinedresser*” needs to be imminent and intelligent; needing to be present and close, engaged and active, in the work of cultivating the vine. Otherwise, the vine will run rampant and wild; take over the entire field, spread out broadly, and consume every available resource without hardly producing any fruit or, without producing any good fruit. Fruit produced by such wild vines are liable to be small and bitter because what is needful, is spread much too thinly across far too much vine. Again, is this an expression of God's Sovereign power and control over all things; over those He dearly loves and cultivates and over those whom He permits to run wild according to their nature.

The next implication grows as a consequence of God's Sovereign work. It concerns our “abiding”, as Jesus next told His disciples, “*Abide in me, and I in you.*”. Now, “to abide” is not a verb commonly used in our modern vernacular. Merriam Webster<sup>1</sup> defines it as, as a transitive verb:

- “to bear patiently”, as functioning synonymously with “to tolerate”;
- “to endure without yielding”, as synonymous with “to withstand”; and,
- “to accept without objection”;

or as, as an intransitive verb:

- “to remain in a stable, or fixed state”;
- or “to continue in a place”, as being synonymous with “to sojourn”.

Although “to abide” is most commonly used in the sense of toleration today, that was not how it is meant when it translates New Testament Greek. Neither of those are the sense that Jesus or John meant it, here in John 15. The Greek term translated as “abide” is *meno*<sup>2</sup>, a term that has several related or similar meanings.

- It means “to remain” or “to stay in place”.
- It means “to dwell, permanently”.
- It means “to remain unchanged” or “to stay in a fixed state”.
- It means “to continue to exist”.

1 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abide>

2 Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*

Shared across each of these meanings is a universal sense of eternal and immutable permanence. This effect causes “abide” to describe an unequal binary. It is unequal because either: one “abides” or one does not; except that, once one chooses to “abide”, they can never again choose to “not abide”. The implication of this is that Jesus' command to “*Abide in me, and I in you.*” is a wonderful promise of security; of perseverance and preservation because, once we begin to abide in Him, we never will not.

Then Jesus explained, “*As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*”.

- A branch that is “disconnected” from the vine/tree/plant cannot produce fruit of any kind because it is dead. While it may look alive and fine, it dies and begins to decay the moment it is cut off. “Life” is unable to reach or flow through a branch that has been severed. There is no sap, meaning there is no water or nutrients moving to the branch. A cut branch no longer serves any functional purpose, in relation to the plant.
- Likewise, a person who does not abide in “*the true vine*” of Jesus Christ; a person who is cut off from God, is spiritually dead and unable to produce spiritual fruit. They may look “alive”, walking around and talking but, they are spiritually dead inside and simply waiting for the physical to catch up with the spiritual. They are unable to produce anything living or “life-giving”. They may have a semblance of life, like cut flowers in a vase, but they lack something essential; they lack the essential quality which gives existence meaning, purpose, and functional value.

Next, Jesus added, “*I am the vine; you are the branches.*”, clearly proclaiming our unity. Consider a tree. Look at its leaves, branches, trunk, or root. You can point at none of those and say that, “This is not the tree.”. While we name and identify each part of the tree individually, each part serves a different purpose and function for the benefit of the whole tree. Each part looks outwardly different but, when you look down at the microscopic level of DNA, they are identical. One tree, with many different parts. Similarly, the Apostle Paul uses this image in 1 Corinthians 12, saying that “*there are many parts, yet one body.*” (1 Cor. 12:20 ESV). He argued from this idea about our union in Christ, that even while having different purposes or functions, different roles and capabilities, or looking differently, we remain united and are each working together for the one united purpose of God's will and plan.

- Christians are “branches” on “the true vine” of Christ. We are extensions of Jesus Christ, living and working and loving in the world for His sake, according to His purpose and plan, and “in His Name”. We do His work, as His branches, while He supports us; while He strengthens and encourages us; while He directs us to where and how we should go.

Then, Jesus described two groups of branches: those who abide in Him and those who do not. “*Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*”. Those who abide in Christ will bear much fruit while those who do not, will wither and be discarded. They will be thrown into the eternal fire and burned. This is an implication which gives us cause to both grieve and be thankful.

- This may (and should) cause us to grieve that there are people who have not been, are not, and will not be saved by God's grace. We should grieve that there is a need for justice to be meted out; for the imposition of divine condemnation and vengeance.
- This should also cause us to be more thankful and grateful for God's mercy, grace, and favor. This should make us more appreciative of what Christ has done for us and to reflect upon how terrible the cost was.

Let us now consider the people who are abiding in Christ. There are two different types of “fruit” that we may expect a Christian to produce: tangible and intangible; but, regardless of type, this fruit will be knowable and recognizable, proving the Christian's faith. But this does not suggest that every Christian will produce every possible fruit, or produce it in the same quantity or to the same degree as every other Christian.

- Tangible fruit often appears through our different Christian works of charity, of love, and kindness. Tangible spiritual fruit often manifests by how we treat others although, it is sometimes not reciprocated by how we are treated in return. Fruit-filled good works are not done for our own, selfish benefit but for the good benefit of others, without any regard for their deserved-ness. Such fruit shows the world that you belong to Christ, that you are like Christ, and that you are a disciple of Christ.
- Intangible spiritual fruit is personal, and internal to each individual Christian. It may even be invisible to an outside observer; where the perceived effect is not always associated with the root cause. The Apostle Paul describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit as “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Gal. 5:22-23 ESV); spiritual qualities that we feel as emotions or quietly express in different ways as we go about our lives. We feel love and joy, while we experience peace. We must practice patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control because none of us have perfected any of these spiritual qualities and, because they are positive opposites to the world's spiritually negative fruit. Yet, even when we fail to practice or exhibit these well, our guilt and remorse afterwards is just as confirming.

Similarly, those who do not abide in Christ (atheists, pagans, idolaters, and Satanists), still may do some of the same physical and practical works as Christians, such as being kind or being charitable towards others.

- For example, giving charity to the poor is the third (of five) Pillar of Islam<sup>3</sup>; what they call *zakat* and is required as “an obligatory charity that is given once per year. Usually, it is 2.5% of a person's savings. It is not a donation, it's a duty.” Ironically, this “Pillar” of *zakat* is applied as a means of purification for the Muslim doing the giving<sup>4</sup>, an idea diametrically opposed to the concept of Christian charity (developed from the Greek term *agape*) which is a practice of purely voluntary, selfless giving or self-sacrificial giving for the improved well-being and benefit of another person.
  - Again, this reminds us that even if an action or activity has the same practical effect, the motivation and intent are what impact its moral quality; whether it is for the LORD as response to the grace of Jesus Christ, or whether it is for our own self-satisfaction or from a sense of forced obligation.
- Likewise, the fruit produced by the worldly and spiritually dead is stale, tasteless, or bitter and no more than a mockery of the Holy Spirit's produce. To them:
  - Love, selfless *agape* love, is corrupted into mere feelings like the sensations of *eros*, as sexual desire, or transactional, *phileo*, as mutual camaraderie and fellowship.
  - Joy is substituted with superficial happiness or gladness.
  - Peace, the wholeness of *shalom*, is replaced by an absence of conflict, without reconciliation or restoration.
  - Patience gets negated by instant gratification.
  - Kindness and goodness are reduced to mere moralism; to simply “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” or “do no harm”.

<sup>3</sup> <https://sakeenaacademy.com/5-pillars-of-islam/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.centeraap.org/blog/arabic-word-month-zakat/#:~:text=%D8%B2%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%A9,beauty%20of%20the%20Arabic%20language.>

- Faithfulness is reduced to legalism; obedience enforced by the threat of legal action; being fearful of hearing someone say, “I’ll sue!”
- Gentleness is re-characterized as weakness and replaced by “strength through fear (or power)”.
- Self-control and temperance are replaced with self-indulgence and hedonism and self-gratification.

Lastly, when good, intangible spiritual fruit is utterly absent from a person, they feel neither remorse nor guilt since they are utterly unconcerned because they are truly dead.

It is clear that those who do not abide in Christ will quickly “burn out” because these are all naturally self-destructive practices and attitudes. They will wither and dry themselves out, proving themselves as not being part of “*the true vine*”. Truly, they judge themselves and begin their condemnation in this life (Romans 2:1-2).

Jesus concludes this thought with the opposite “book end” of John 14:13-14, saying “*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*”, closing out His teaching about proper prayer.

- If we abide in Christ and if His Word abides within us then, because of our being united with Christ, we shall always pray according to the will and purposes of Jesus, God the Son. Therefore, we shall truly wish for whatever the LORD desires and so, His will shall be done.
- If we abide in Christ and if His Word abides within us then, because of our being united with Christ, everything we do shall be done for His glory (WSC #1). We shall regularly bear good fruit (tangible and/or intangible spiritual fruit) and thereby prove ourselves Christ's disciples; proving it to the world, to one another in the Church, and to ourselves as part of the Holy Spirit's encouragement.

There is another implication that we need to consider regarding Jesus's status as “the true vine”; as the “true Israel”. Some people may think that this implication sounds harsh or feels unkind, unloving, and unpleasant because of certain common cultural assumptions which many people make. This implication concerns modern day Judaism, Jews and the modern State of Israel. It derives from a popular, but severely flawed, system of theology known as “dispensationalism” and the eschatological expectation known as “pre-millennialism”. These systems assume that ethnic (or cultural) Jews are (or will be) “saved” simply by virtue of their “race” and also that the modern State of Israel, established after World War 2 in 1948, is a specific fulfillment of biblical prophecy concerning the Jews. Regardless of whether or not a person agrees with these interpretations, a consequence of this assumption is that presently “the Jews” and “Israel” reside in an unusual and unique place in the American mindset; a cultural position that should be described as “idolatrous”, especially because of the intense feelings that people have about the Jews. Feelings of:

- uncertainty and doubt about;
- animosity against; and,
- a hope of redemption and restoration for both the Jews and Israel.

Ironically, these feelings are not new. Similar feelings have echoed across history and we even find evidence of them in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 11, about the LORD's rejection of ethnic Jews in favor of Gentile inclusion in His elect Israel. Sometimes the things that Paul writes on this subject may seem contradictory, in light of some of his other epistles, but, on close examination, he is remarkably consistent.

Paul explains, across both Romans 4:13-25 and Galatians 3:17-29, how our salvation is the result of God's gracious promise to Abraham for Abraham's offspring. Which begs the question, “Who are or who is Abraham's offspring?”, since he was father to both Ishmael and Isaac, and several other ignored sons. God told Abraham, in Genesis 21, that “...*through Isaac shall your offspring be named.*” (Gen. 21:12 ESV); Paul identifies Isaac as

the “child of promise” (Romans 9:6-9), and concludes that “...not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring...” (Rom. 9:6-7 ESV), that “...it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.” (Rom. 9:8 ESV).

So, while the Apostle affirmed a Jewish hereditary right to “*the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.*” (Rom. 9:4 ESV), he countered argued that the ethnic Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, “*the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.*” (Rom. 9:5 ESV) possessed the ultimate and sole right to them, as Abraham's singular “offspring” (Galatians 3:16).

- Paul taught that the free gift of God's salvation was never a matter of ethnicity, race, natural descent, or family relations (Galatians 3:28) but union with Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:27), “*the true vine*” through *pisteuo* in Him, alone (Galatians 3:22).
- Paul taught that, “...*if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*” (Galatians 3:29). If you are abiding in Christ “*the true vine*”, as one of His branches, then you are a fellow heir of Abraham, “*according to promise*”; you are one of the elect, chosen people of God and you belong to the “true Israel”.
- Then, Paul quoted Isaiah, speaking about the Gentiles' relationship to the LORD, saying “*I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.*” (Rom. 10:20 ESV), but while speaking about Jewish Israel, Isaiah “...*says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."*” (Rom. 10:21 ESV). This prompts the Apostle to ask, “...*has God rejected his people?*” (Rom. 11:1 ESV), and answer, “*By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.*” (Rom. 11:1 ESV). Using the example of Elijah (Romans 11:2-4), Paul taught that a “remnant” of Abraham's natural descendants are (and will be) preserved for the LORD as part of the “true Israel”; “...*a remnant, chosen by grace.*” (Rom. 11:5 ESV).

Therefore, neither Judaism nor being born as an ethnic Jew has any bearing upon a person's salvation or right standing before the LORD. The many promises of God are not effective for or applied to all of Abraham's ethnic descendants as a natural birthright. Yet, being united into Jesus, who is an ethnic Jew and Abraham's ultimate heir, some ethnic Jews who believe in Jesus as the Christ, are receiving the promises right alongside Gentile Christians. Every one of us has the same absolute, foundational requirement of possessing God-given, *pisteuo* faith in Jesus as the Christ: the Son of God and God the Son, the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*. This makes everyone who is redeemed and saved by Jesus, equal in God's eyes. We are equal in our standing and we are equal in His favor and love, because we were each saved according to His grace, alone.

However, this is where the supposed “problem” begins, once “people” are added into the equation; even sinner's redeemed by grace. Unfortunately, some people throughout history have misrepresented Paul's position and have used his words to terrible and hateful effect against ethnic and religious Jews. The Apostle Paul was not an “anti-Semite”. His doctrine does not encourage or support “antisemitism” and such views are out of accord with the Christian faith and are contrary to the Christian witness. We should not feel any special hatred, dislike, or animosity towards ethnic Jews or to people who profess the Jewish religion. We also should not ascribe them any special favor, preference, or deference, since functionally, they are the same (their salvific status is the same) as any other person before their regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

After he rebuked the Judaic perspective and argued that the Jews have no claim upon the love, favor, or right relationship with God simply because of their birth lineage (which was a plainly self-righteous viewpoint that came out of Second Temple Judaism), Paul turned his attention to Gentile Christians and chastised their own sense of self-righteousness (Romans 11:13). The Apostle argues two points towards the Gentiles:

- That they should remain prayerfully hopeful for the Jews to come to faith in Jesus Christ; and,

- That they should not be arrogant, or feel themselves superior to the Jews, because no one is naturally better than any other, in relation to receiving God's grace.

Paul happily proclaimed, *“I magnify my ministry [his ministry to the Gentiles] in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.”* Paul retained hope for his “race”: his kinsmen and his nation (or people) of origin. He earnestly desired their salvation as much as he desired the salvation of Gentiles. He denied the suggestion that the Jews were sacrificially “written off” so that the rest of the world could be reconciled, *“For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?”*. Instead he taught that their dis-inclusion as a corporate body (as an ethnic people), should build up confidence that their potential salvation as individual persons, would be an encouragement for other believers; increasing our expectant hope of our future, bodily resurrection with Christ on “the Last Day”.

Paul implies that since ethnic Jews are grown from Abraham's faithful branch, through his grandson Jacob (Israel), *“...if the root is holy, so are the branches.”*, then, some of this holiness might still be retained, even in those who are cut off. Thus he admonishes the Gentile Christians to be mindful, saying *“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.”* He taught them to not believe that they are better than the Jews because they now enjoy God's love. He warned them against arrogance, saying, *“Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”*, by reminding them that they were grafted in for no reason of greatness within themselves, *“...do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.”*. The same goes for us.

However, since we believe in God's sovereign election; believing and knowing that God does not change His mind; trusting Jesus when He said, *“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”* (Jn. 10:29-30 ESV); we know that Paul was not suggesting a Christian can lose their salvation. Rather, we understand that he was talking about God's work of “pruning”, not “cutting off”. He was talking about sanctification, describing how we may feel like we are suffering, when really what we are experiencing is pain from the Holy Spirit cutting off unhealthy, harmful, and dangerously sinful things from our hearts and our lives. He also encourages them, *“Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.”*, reminding them that while the Jews were separated because of their “unbelief”, true Christians shall *“...stand fast through faith.”* Again, he was not warning against a Christian losing their salvation, but warning about those who make false professions of faith (1 John 2:19; Hebrews 10:26-29). Paul warned that while such people may enjoy some of our same benefits presently, they are ultimately doomed. He warned that they are like cut flowers in a vase, having some semblance of life, but lacking any meaningful connection to the true source of life.

Finally, Paul again expresses his hope for the salvation of Jews, saying *“...if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.”* Paul taught that, even still, their salvation is not beyond God's power and that their inclusion would result in an even greater increase in God's glory. All that is required for their restoration, is for them to repent and believe; to turn to Jesus Christ in faith, no differently than anybody else.

- The Jews are saved the same way as anyone else; the same way that we are: through the Grace of God, by Faith in Jesus Christ, alone.
- The Jews are saved the same way as the pagans, atheists, heretics, and Islamists: through the Grace of God, by Faith in Jesus Christ, alone.

- The Jews are saved the same was as the patriarchs, the ancient Israelites, the Hebrews, and the Jews of the Second Temple period: through the Grace of God, by sincere Faith in the LORD, Jesus Christ, alone.

So, while we can and should be prayerfully hopeful for the salvation and conversion of Jews, just as we are hopeful for the salvation and conversion of Muslims and all other types of non-Christians, we cannot assume that anyone is saved except and unless they profess faith Jesus Christ and exhibit signs of positive spiritual fruit (John 14:6, 13:34-35; Acts 4:12).

Therefore, this is one of the most consequential and biggest implications of Jesus being “*the true vine*”; He was asserting Himself as the “true Israel” and as Abraham's “offspring”, the ultimate heir of God's promises from across all of redemptive history. This is why understanding the doctrine of our union into Him is so important, because our only hope of receiving and benefiting from those promises: our only hope for salvation; is through our inclusion in Christ: as part of His “Body” (1 Corinthians 12:27); as branches grafted into His “root” (Romans 11:17) and “vine” (John 15:5). Again, it is through our union with Christ: of our being so closely associated and identified with Jesus, that His righteousness (both the active and passive) is imputed to us; that the Holy Spirit may regenerate our hearts and share Christ's life into us; that together with Them, we shall produce the good which our Father in heaven, the “*vinedresser*”, desires from us.

Another greatly consequential implication that comes from Christ's analogy as “*the true vine*”, concerns our understanding of the Church; concerning our understanding about who are and who are not saved. Under the old covenant, the Jews had the sacramental sign of circumcision to physically identify those who belonged to God's people Israel. However, Paul “spoke the quiet part out loud” when he said that “...*not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring...*” (Rom. 9:6-7 ESV); a simple fact that was historically obvious, when all of Jewish history is considered, as so many ethnic Israelites proved themselves to be faithless and were cut off, while countless Gentiles proved themselves to be faithful and were grafted into the people {an important message that is contained within Jesus's genealogy in Matthew: the inclusion of Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba}. Belonging to God's people has never been a matter of birth or circumcision. Likewise, Christians baptize their children, yet that does not guarantee their salvation any more than circumcision did for the Jews. The salvation of God is received by faith, alone; by faith in Jesus Christ, alone (Ephesians 3:8-10).

- And Abraham “...*believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*” (Gen. 15:6 ESV)
- And the prophets told us, “...*the righteous shall live by his faith.*” (Hab. 2:4 ESV; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38)

It does not matter whether a person is born a Jew or a Gentile, the means of their salvation is the same: faith in Jesus Christ; and their opportunity for salvation is the same: by God's sovereign election. The doctrine of election is not harmful, hateful, or unloving for us to declare and believe. Rather, it emphasizes our reliance on God's grace and our thankfulness His covenantal redeeming work. This means that the Jews and national Israel do not enjoy any special divine privilege in the world. Likewise, neither do Christians or the United States. Nor should we not expect to because, as Christians, our true hope and expectation lies beyond this world and this present life; where we shall abide with Jesus Christ in His eternal kingdom. An abiding that, even now, we may partly experience and enjoy through our personal, devotional Scripture reading (Deuteronomy 6:4-13), through our gathering together in Sunday worship (Hebrews 10:23-25), in our fellowship meals (Acts 2:46-47), and through your own private and public moments of prayer (John 14:13-14; 15:7).

So, to conclude, consider your answer to last week's question regarding your sense of fruitfulness, how are you doing?

If you want to bear fruit as a Christian (or, if you want to bear more and better fruit), then you must do as Jesus said, and “*Abide in [Him].*” for “*As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in [Him].*”.

Lastly, this week I will ask, are you abiding in the vine of Christ or are you abiding in the world's vine? Are you abiding securely, being united into Christ: unshakably and unchangeably; or are you feeling unsettled or disconnected from God?

**AMEN**