

"I AM the VINE"

Jn 15:1-8; Mt 7:13-20; Heb 12:6-8

I. THE "TRUE" VINE

- A. "True" elevates the analogy to spiritual realm—particularist, exclusionary
- B. Vine import—as often, Jesus uses analogies from nature; supernatural hints in natural realm
 - 1. Wild grapevines found throughout the world (e.g. Vikings find "Vinland")
 - 2. Ancient viticulture (Armenia & Georgia); one of most widely-cultivated crops
 - 3. Various areas, given right soil, proper nutrients, good drainage
 - 4. Light's significance; thus often on hillsides open to sun
 - 5. In virtually all plants, *transpiration* moves water & nutrients through vine to grapes—passive process involving adhesion and cohesion, defying gravity
- C. As the "true" vine Jesus says He provides what's needed for spiritual life, personal well-being

II. THE "VINEDRESSER" FATHER

- A. Viticulture vital for healthy plants, good grapes and fine wines, so the Father "husbands" His children
 - 1. Planting in healthy soil—Jesus parable re "sower" and receptive soils (Mt 13:1-9)
 - 2. Nurturing with right fertilizer—necessary, added ingredients for spiritual health, wholeness
 - 3. Irrigating as needed—Jesus to woman at the well re "living water"
 - 4. Shielding from, eliminating pests & diseases—"shield of faith," inoculations, medications
 - 5. Cutting off, discarding, dead material—losing or letting go of superfluous things;
 - 6. Pruning plants for optimal productivity—Paul re athletes, soldiers
- B. Thus the "Hard Sayings" of Jesus—indicating disciples cannot be passive recipients
 - 1. "Narrow Way" (Mt 7:13-20)
 - 2. Consequently, numbers of followers depart (Jn 6:16)—a pattern found throughout Church history
- C. God disciplines disciples—Heb 12:6-8)
 - 1. Convicting of sin (*hamartia*)—Jn 16:8-11
 - 2. Correcting waywardness—indolence, inattention, ineptness
 - 3. Strengthening exercises—daily work to maintain strength; spiritual & corporal acts of mercy
- D. Church discipline necessary, especially when doctrine is at stake
 - 1. New Testament Church—Simon Magus; Ananias and Sapphira
 - 2. Ecumenical Councils & "anathemas"
 - 3. Denominational assemblies & boards—e.g. Assemblies of God & Jimmy Swaggart; Nazarene districts taking action re gay agenda
 - 4. Congregational pastors & boards reproofing or removing members
 - 5. Heresies, old & new
 - a. Theological—Trinitarian, Christological issues—Unitarians; "Open Theology" & Process Philosophy
 - b. Soteriological—Pelagianism; Fatalism; current "liberation" theologies of various sorts
 - 6. Moral laxity, old & new
 - a. Benedictine decay & Cluniac reforms
 - b. Jesuit permissiveness & Pascal's *Letters*
 - c. Lutheran "Scholasticism" & Pietist response
 - d. Anglican "Latitudinarianism" ("broadmindedness") & Wesleyan movement
 - e. 20th century German church & Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship*
 - f. United Methodist support for abortion, sodomy & World Methodism formation

III. "ABIDE in ME"

- A. Branches totally dependent on vine, cannot live & thrive apart from it
- B. Sustaining the vital connection via "means of grace"
 - 1. Believing the Word, keeping Christ's commandments
 - 2. Prayer (personal & congregational, extemporaneous & liturgical)
 - 3. Church attendance, signaling profession of faith & supporting fellow believers
 - 4. Receiving Holy Communion
 - 5. Attuned to the Holy Spirit ("the sap of the Father's vine")