

John 15:1-8

- I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener -

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Introduction

- ❖ This image has a parallel in Psalm 80:8-11: "You (LORD) brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River." The vine out of Egypt is the people of Israel. It was planted in the promised land. The branches could cover the soil and also climb cedars by their tendrils in search of sunlight. The grapes were important agricultural produce, its fruit (Ezek 18:2) and also for the production of wine.
- ❖ Jesus applies this image to himself, the disciples and the church, and as long as the branches are connected with the vine, the rootstock. The disciples are like clean branches grafted into the rootstock. The rootstock and its branches need pruning to produce good fruit.
 - The Father is the gardener.
 - Jesus is the true vine, the rootstock.
 - The disciples and all those who believe through their message in Jesus (Jn 17:20) are the branches.
 - They will produce fruit to glorify the Father.
- ❖ This narrative, including the image of the vine, is meant to emphasize the following:
 - The glory of the Father.
 - The communion with Christ.
 - The fruits of faith and obedience.
 - A severe warning.

- And a lasting promise.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of John. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ An overview of John 13-21:

John 13:1-30	The Last Supper
John 31:31-14:31	Final discourse – part I
John 15:1-16:33	Final discourse – part II
John 17:1-26	The “Last Prayer” of Jesus
John 18:1-19:42	The arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death of Jesus
John 20:1-29	The resurrection of Jesus and the first appearances

- ❖ John 15:1-8 is part of John 15:1-17 and belongs to the Final Discourse – part II:

John 15:1-8	<p>“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.” (Jn 15:1)</p> <p>In these passages the following words are recurring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “bear fruit” (4 times) ❖ “remain in me / you (vine)” (7 times) ❖ “ask” (1 time)
John 15:9-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “loved” (4 times) ❖ “remain in my/his love” (3 times) ❖ “obey(ed)” (2 times) ❖ “My command is this: Love each other” (Jn 15:12)
John 15:13-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “friends” (3 times)
John 15:16-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “bear fruit” (1 time) ❖ “ask” (1 time) ❖ “This is my command: Love each other” (Jn 15:17)

- ❖ This overview makes clear that John 15:1-8 and 15:9-17 correspond to each other, as the highlighted texts show: “bear fruit” and “ask”. Jesus moves his thoughts step by step forward to end with his final admonishment: “remain in me” > “remain in my love.” And: “My command is this: Love each other” (12) > “This is my command: Love each other” (17).

Form and structure

- ❖ John 15:1-8

<p><i>A. The vine and the Father</i> (verse 1)</p>	<p>I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.</p>
<p><i>B. The gardener, the vine and the disciples</i> (verse 2-4): <i>Remain in me</i></p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you.</p>
	<p>No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.</p>
<p><i>C. The vine and the branches</i> (verse 5.a)</p>	<p>I am the vine; you are the branches.</p>
<p><i>B' Three conditional clauses</i> (verse 5.b-7): <i>Remain in me</i></p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.</p>
<p><i>A'. The Father and the vine</i> (verse 8)</p>	<p>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.</p>

- ❖ This narrative has an ABCB'A' - structure:
 - A. Introduction: the Father and the vine;
 - B. Remain in me;
 - C. The vine and the branches (the disciples);
 - B'. Remain in me;
 - A'. Conclusion: the Father receives glory.
- ❖ Note that:
 - **Remain(s) in** is used nine times. This stresses the importance of communion and fellowship with Christ.
 - The **word(s)** of Christ (**λόγος**, verse 3; **τὰ ῥήματά**, verse 7) occur in both parts.
 - Most of the sentences are in first en second person (I, my, you) except for the first two conditional clauses. See below.
 - The glory of the Father through fruit-bearing is the objective: John 15:1, 8.

Technical notes and theological background

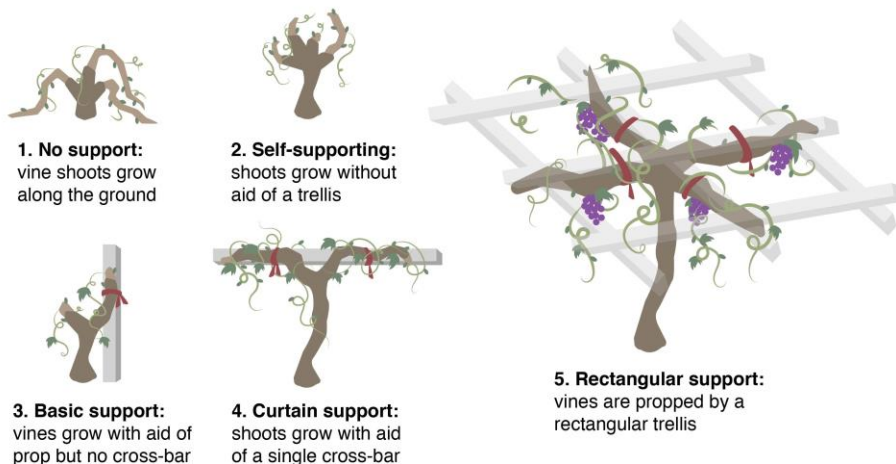
Viticulture – vineyard; Biblical references

- ❖ Jesus refers to the ancient practice of cultivating vines. In many countries, people are not familiar with the growth of the vine, a vineyard and viticulture. Therefore some explanation will be needed.
 - It is a very ancient form of agriculture. In the Bible, Noah planted a vineyard (Gen 9:20) just after the flood.
 - Other instances in which a vine or vineyard is mentioned:
 - The dream of the cup-bearer (Gen 40:9, 10).
 - Joseph is blessed by his father Jacob, who compares him to a vine (Gen 49:22).
 - The importance of viticulture in Israel is also shown by the occurrence of several laws (Ex 22:5; 23: 11; Lev 19:10; 25:3-5). Leviticus 23:3-5 refers to **the pruning of the vineyard**.
 - They had different vines: “He planted it with the choicest vines” (Isa 5:2). Some vines were imported (Isa 17:10), “a choice vine of sound and reliable stock” (Jer 2:21).
 - In Psalm 80, Israel is compared to a vine; the LORD is compared to the gardener:
 - **“You brought a vine out of Egypt;**

- you drove out the nations and planted it.
 - You cleared the ground for it,
 - and it took root and filled the land.
 - The mountains were covered with its shade,
 - the mighty cedars with its branches.
 - It sent out its boughs to the Sea,
 - Its shoots as far as the River" (Ps 80:9-11).
 - See also Isaiah 5:7: "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight." "Israel was a spreading vine" (Hos 10:1).
- The image of the vineyard is used in three parables:
 - The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1-16).
 - The Parable of the Two Sons (Mt 21:28-32).
 - The Parable of the Tenants (Mt 21:33-46).
 - In the latter two parables, the vineyard stands for the Kingdom of God.

Viticulture – vineyard; images

Ancient Methods of Vine Training



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- In ancient Israel vines probably grew covering the ground (no. 1; Psalm 80: it took root and filled the land.). The Romans used supporting bars (no. 4 and 5).

- A mosaic found in Algeria (North Africa) depicts Roman viticulture using rectangular support:



- The 'Foro Boario' vineyard at Pompeii, was replanted as it was at the time of the eruption (A.D. 79), with a small wine press in a structure at back.¹

¹ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vigneti_di_foro_boario.JPG



Vines and the second temple

- ❖ Josephus described the second temple, which was adorned by Herod as follows
 - **3.** (391) So Herod took away the old foundations, and laid others, and erected the temple upon them (...) (394) The temple had doors also at the entrance, and lintels over them, of the same height with the temple itself. They were adorned with embroidered veils, with their flowers of purple, and pillars interwoven: (395) **and over these, but under the crown-work, was spread out a golden vine, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators,** to see what vast materials there were, and with what great skill the workmanship was done.²
- ❖ This description shows the importance of the vine imagery, the grapes giving glory.

Exposition

An analysis of the narrative (Jn 15:-1-8)

- ❖ The main characters are:
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² Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987, p. 423–424). See for Josephus: Wikimedia Foundation. (2022, April 3). Josephus. Wikipedia. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus>

- The Father. He is the gardener and will receive glory.
- Jesus. He is the true vine.
- ❖ The supporting characters are:
 - The disciples, who are grafted into the vine by the word of Jesus;
 - Anyone.
- ❖ The main actions:
 - To remain in me (by the words of Jesus);
 - To ask and receive;
 - **To glorify the Father** in bearing fruit.
- ❖ The supporting image, viticulture:
 - The vine and its branches, bear fruit.
 - The cutting of branches, which will be thrown away, wither, collected, and burned.
 - The pruning of branches to be more fruitful.
- ❖ **The glorification of the Father by the vine and its branches is the main thrust of this narrative!**

Verse 1-2

- ❖ **“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.”**
 - **“I am the true wine”** is the final "I-am"-saying:
 - John 4:25, 26: "The Messiah";
 - John 6:35, 48, 51: "I am the bread of life";
 - John 8:12: "I am the light of the world";
 - John 8:58: "before Abraham was born, I am!";
 - John 10:7, 9: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep";
 - John 10:11, 14: "I am the good shepherd";
 - John 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life";
 - John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life".
 - Psalm 80 describes God as the gardener and Israel as the vine. By declaring himself **“the true vine”**, Jesus indicates that he embodies the true Israel, the son of God (Ex 4:21-23). Is it also an intimation that Israel is the **“false vine”**,³ that part of Israel who rejects Jesus as the Messiah?

³ Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A. (1993, p. 477).

- Carson comments: “Most remarkable is the fact that whenever historic Israel is referred to under this figure it is the vine’s failure to produce good fruit that is emphasized, along with the corresponding threat of God’s judgment on the nation.”⁴ See Isa 5:1–7; 27:2-6; Jer 2:21; 12:10, 11; Ezek 15:1–8; 17:1–21; 19:10–14; Hos 10:1–2.
- He is also the true vine because he imparts true life.⁵
- See also the prayer of Psalm 80 (80:14-18):
- "Return to us, O God Almighty!
- Look down from heaven and see!
- Watch over this vine,
- the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself.
- Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire;
- at your rebuke your people perish.
- **Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,**
- **the son of man you have raised up for yourself.**
- Then we will not turn away from you;
- revive us, and we will call on your name."

❖ The gardener, the Father: **“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.”**

- The Father continues to be at work. **“Branch in me”** refers to the true community of Christ.
 - Jesus doesn't explain how this process of cutting and pruning takes place. It is enough to know that the Gardener does know what he is doing in his wisdom, love, and care for the vine (his beloved son!).
- A similar image is used by Paul in Romans 11:17-21 about the olive tree.
- **“Fruit.”** See below verse 8.

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991, p. 513).

⁵ Haenchen, E., Funk, R. W., & Busse, U. (1984, p. 131).

Verse 3-4

❖ “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

- Jesus probably refers indirectly to the agricultural practice of grafting a shoot in the rootstock. The grafts need to be clean, just like the disciples needed to be clean.
- “Clean” = “καθαρός”: 3. **pertaining to being free from moral guilt, pure, free** from sin.⁶ “The Word also plays a crucial role in the cleansing, for it is the obedient response to its proclamation that transforms the inner man.”⁷
- “word” = “λόγος”: “teaching” (Jn 14:23).
 - See also “the washing of the feet” (Jn 13:10, 11).

❖ “Remain in me, and I will remain in you.”

- “Remain” = “μένω”: 1. **remain, stay** of someone who does not leave a certain realm or sphere: *remain, continue, abide*. The phrase “remain in” is a favourite of John to denote an inward, enduring personal communion of love. So of God in his relation to Christ, *the Father, who abides in me* (Jn 14:10). Of Christians in their relation to Christ (Jn 6:56; 15:4, 5–7). Of Christ relating to Christians (Jn 15:4, 5). Of Christians relating to God. Of God relating to Christians.⁸
- “To ‘remain in’ Jesus has a deeper significance than simply to continue to believe in him, although it includes that; it connotes continuing to live in association or in union with him”⁹ and his love, it signifies true fellowship.
 - John 15:9: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. **Now remain in my love.**” It is a community of mutual love (Jn 14:21, 23).
 - John 15:10: “**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.” See also John 14:31.
- This is explained by the following example and lesson.
 - **“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.**
 - **Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”**

⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 489).

⁷ Hartley, J. E. (1979–1988, Vol. 1, p. 722). *Clean and Unclean*. In G. W. Bromiley (Ed.).

⁸ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 631).

⁹ Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1999, Vol. 36, p. 272).

Verse 5-7

- ❖ **“I am the vine; you are the branches.”** These words conclude the previous part and introduce the second part. **“I”** and **“you”** are here used emphatically. The branches are clearly distinguished from the vine.
- ❖ There are three conditional clauses. The first two are cast in the third person: **“if a man”** accept for the second part of the first clause. The third clause is an exhortation for the **“disciples”**. The **additions** emphasize the main message **“remain in me.”**

conditional	Anyone	Disciples (you)
1 st clause	If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;	



addition (emphasis)		apart from me you can do nothing.
2 nd clause	If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers;	
addition (emphasis)	such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.	
3 rd clause		If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

- ❖ **“if a man” and “if anyone”** shows that this narrative is not solely applicable to the eleven, but also to all those who believe in Jesus, as is made clear by:
 - “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for **those who will believe in me through their message**, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:20, 21).
 - **“Apart from me you can do nothing.”** This refers implicitly to the Spirit and his work (Jn 14:16, 17; 26: “But **the Counselor**, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**” “He will guide you into all truth” (Jn 16:13). “All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you” (Jn 16:15).
 - **“he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers;....thrown into the fire and burned.”**
 - This is a severe warning to anyone who forsakes Jesus. The image is taken from the viticulture and implicitly applied to the eschatological judgement.
 - “The tenses of the (Greek) verbs (“**thrown away and withers**”) in verse 6 are difficult.”¹⁰ “An author (John) sometimes uses the aorist *for* the future **to stress the certainty of the event.**”¹¹
- ❖ **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you”**
 - This is a strong assurance, needed because: “apart from me you can do nothing.”
 - “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do” (Jn 14:13–14; 15:7–8, 16; 16:23, 26). In other words, Jesus promises the Father’s positive response to prayer when it is aligned with his will, a point made explicit in 1 John 5:14: **“This is our assurance we have in him, that whatever we ask according to his will, he hears us.”**¹²
 - Borchert writes: “As Westcott (St. John, 2.201) pointedly states, the **‘petitions of the true disciples are echoes (so to speak) of’ the words of Jesus** because his teaching is ‘transformed into a supplication, and so it will be necessarily heard.’”¹³

¹⁰ Carson, D. A. (1991, p. 517).

¹¹ Wallace, D. B. (1996, p. 564).

¹² Crump, D. M. (2013, p. 691).

¹³ Borchert, G. L. (2002, Vol. 25B, p. 145).

- Carson remarks: “Such words must so lodge in the disciple’s mind and heart that conformity to Christ, obedience to Christ, is the most natural (supernatural?) thing in the world.”¹⁴

Verse 8

❖ “This is to my Father’s glory,”

- “glory” = “δοξάζω”: 2. **to cause to have splendid greatness, clothe in splendor, glorify.** . It is a favorite term in John in which the whole life of Jesus is depicted as a glorifying of the Son by the Father (Jn 8:54; 11:4; 12:28; 13:31; 17:1, 4). At the same time, the Father is glorified by the Son (Jn 13:31, 32; 14:13; 17:1). The glorification culminates in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Jn 7:39; 12:16, 23, 28; 13:31, 32; 17:1, 5, 10). Jesus is glorified through the working of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (Jn 16:14) and through his disciples (Jn 17:10), who also glorify the Father (Jn 15:8), especially in martyrdom (of Peter; Jn 21:19).¹⁵
- “showing yourselves to be my disciples.”
 - “The primary task of the disciple is to glorify Jesus (see Jn 17:10; 21:19), who glorifies the Father. This bearing of fruit, therefore, not only indicates that the followers are true disciples of Jesus but also that God is glorified in their discipleship.”¹⁶ “This must not be understood as implying that the disciples glorify the Father directly as the result of their own actions. **It is because they abide in Jesus, the Vine, and are obedient to him in the bearing of fruit that they bring glory to the Father.**”¹⁷ (Borchert referring to C. Barth.)
 - John 8:31: **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”**
 - John 13:35: “By this all men will know that **you are my disciples, if you love one another.**”
- “that you bear much fruit.” The fruit is summarized in these words: **“love one another.”**
 - “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn 13:34; 15:9-17). This love might imply martyrdom (Jn 15:13; 21:19).
 - **See also 1 John 3:11-24; 4:7-21; 5:1-3.**

¹⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991, p. 517).

¹⁵ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000; p. 258).

¹⁶ Borchert, G. L. (2002, Vol. 25B, p. 146).

¹⁷ Borchert, G. L. (2002, Vol. 25B, p. 146).

- “I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:23).

Application

Before

- ❖ It is advisable to depict the image of the vine, the branches, and the fruit. If people are not familiar with the vine, it can be explained by using other examples of known fruit-bearing plants or trees.

Glorify God in Christ

- ❖ The Father is the gardener. He is at work in his vineyard.
 - **“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.”**
 - There are two aspects:
 - removing non-fruit-bearing branches;
 - and pruning of fruit-bearing branches – the fruit is mutual love (Jn 15:9-12).
 - He will be glorified by his own work (Jn 15:8).
 - **“He cuts off every branch.”** Carson comments: “Indeed, there is a persistent strand of New Testament witness that depicts men and women with some degree of connection with Jesus, or with the Christian church, who nevertheless by failing to display the grace of perseverance finally testify that the transforming life of Christ has never pulsed within them (take for instance Mt 13:18–23; 24:12; Jn 8:31-41; Heb. 3:14–19; 1 Jn 2:19; 2 Jn 9).¹⁸
 - It is not advisable, to apply this work of the Father to particular situations in the church, in the congregations, or the lives of particular Christians.
 - The main purpose is:
 - Trust and have faith in the Father (Jn 14: 1, 2).

Remain Christ – this is the recurring theme!

- ❖ **“Remain in me”** signifies intimate fellowship with Christ (through the Holy Spirit):

¹⁸ Carson, D. A. (1991, p. 515).

- John 14:16: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—” (Jn 14:21, 23, 26)
- John 6:35: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”
- John 6:56: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”
- John 14:20: “I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” See also John 17:21-23.
- In the Gospel of John “word” is associated with eternal life: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life” (Jn. 5:24).¹⁹ As per consequence, to remain in Jesus implies eternal life (Jn 17:3).

❖ **“Apart from me...”**

- “The point is made clear: continuous dependence on the vine, constant reliance upon him, persistent spiritual imbibing of his life—this is the *sine qua non* of spiritual fruitfulness.”²⁰
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- Therefore the necessity of prayer needs to be stressed (Jn 15:7).
 - “There is a direct connection between how one prays and the primary commitments of one’s life. Jesus (...) demands that the fundamental commitment of a disciple’s life is abiding in him. That means that the model of Jesus in life and word must permeate the life and words of the disciple. When this happens, praying ceases to be selfish asking and becomes aligned with the will and purposes of God in Christ.”²¹

Fruit

- ❖ This fruit must not be taken for targets and positive results, like church growth, or an increase in numbers and converts. The fruit is love, in such a way that believers show that they are disciples of Jesus. This faithfulness and love might result in persecution and martyrdom (Jn 21:15-19; Peter).
 - Matthew 5:10-12: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you

¹⁹ Edwards, R. B. (1979–1988, Vol. 4, p. 1105). *Word*. In G. W. Bromiley (Ed.).

²⁰ Carson, D. A. (1991, p. 516).

²¹ Borchert, G. L. (2002, (Vol. 25B, p. 145)).

and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

❖ Other aspects of fruit:

- John 4:14: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The Samaritan woman became a spring of water (Jn 4:28-30, 39-41).
- John 7:38: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."
- John 14:12: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

Disciples

- ❖ "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." (Jn 8:31).

The Lord's Supper and the true vine

- ❖ John 6:35, 36: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

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