

## 1 John Series

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### SESSION 4 9/22/2013

Review the Trinity and begin to look at John's vocabulary

Time > History > Inductive reasoning as a gift of God (Slide 2)

Nature > Person > Personal effects on others (Slide 3)

Review John's meaning of "truth": biblical concept of truth vs humanist concept of truth (Slide 4)

Understanding a key word that John uses and why he is NOT referring to Paul's "in Christ" phrase. Here's some background on how John pictures "abiding in Christ."

"Abiding" vocabulary (15:1-10) "abide" [Greek *meno*]*—salvation or sanctification?*

*[this discussion is fundamental to deciding whether 1 John consists of tests of salvation (understood as justification) or tests of sanctification]*

We go back to how God related to Israel in the Old Testament, which I explain in the Biblical Framework and in the [study of the Book of Deuteronomy](#). The nation Israel is related to God through both the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant, given to the founding Jew around 2000 BC, and the conditional Mosaic Covenant, given at Mt. Sinai some six centuries later.

The Abrahamic Covenant guarantees the continuous historical existence of the Jewish counter-culture and its final victory as a physical nation. This covenant, therefore, is the foundation of, and answers to, the New Testament terminology of justification which evangelicals today most often mean by the term "salvation."

The Mosaic Covenant, on the other hand, controls the parental relationship God has with Israel as its "father" who over the centuries is raising His child for one day being the lead nation in the 1,000-year long Kingdom of God on earth. This relationship through the centuries involves blessings and cursings—including the very severe discipline of being temporarily removed from its promised land—to teach this, His child, the consequences of honoring God or dishonoring Him.

A frequent picture of this up-and-down relationship is that of a vineyard. Note the following passages where Old Testament prophets warned of the national apostasy and eventual removal of Israel from the land as the destruction of the Lord's vineyard (Isa. 5:7; Jer. 2:21; 5:10-11; 12:10-11; Ezk. 15:1-8; 17:1-24). The vineyard thus pictures the nation Israel occupying the Promised Land until their sin necessitated divine destruction and exile. The theology here is that of the Mosaic covenant, not that of the Abrahamic covenant. Destruction of the vineyard thus looks at temporal discipline or sanctification,

not a permanent end of the nation or loss of its salvation at the Exodus as God's priestly nation that will endure to the end of mortal history. (Slide 5)

### **John 15:1-6**

John uses the term "abide" in the same fashion as Jesus used it in the Upper Room Discourse (John 15:2, 6). How did Jesus use the term? In chapter 15 Jesus selects a metaphor to illustrate the teaching He has just begun in chapter 14. There He began to teach about the relationship believers would have with the Trinity after the cross, resurrection, and ascension has occurred.

By the time of John 15, Judas, the only unbeliever, had left the room (13:20). Thus everyone in that room with Jesus was a believer (note 15:3). Jesus looks not at a whole vineyard, but at a single vine. He is that single vine. All the branches start out "in" the Messiah. At issue is how He will treat them.

I asked a member of this church who owns a real actively-producing vineyard to show me some basic truths that might illuminate Jesus' use of vineyard management to show us how the Father manages our spiritual growth (sanctification).

(Slide 6) Because grape vines, like most plants, need light on all their leaves, vineyard owners plant the vines in a north-south orientation. This way during the day as the sun moves from east to west sunlight falls on both sides of the plant. Spiritual insight: to grow and be fruitful we need the light of God's glory coming to us through His Word. John uses the concept of light in several key passages (e.g., John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:9-10). Think about this: God has so created the physical world that at the bottom of the food chain is photosynthesis to turn light into the organic molecules fueling all plant and ultimately animal life on earth. His design analogically pictures the spiritual structure of God, revelation, and man's response to it!

(Slide 7) Grape vines have to be supported so their strength can be devoted to fruit bearing. Moreover, the vineyard owner/manager must thoroughly prune each vine so all the leaves that are left are open to the light and to cross ventilation to prevent fungus and mildew. I asked him what percent he generally has to prune away from the vines to have them produce much fruit instead of many leaves. His answer: about 80%!! He said if he left the vines to themselves, they would produce a lot of leaves and branches but little fruit.

(Slide 8) When properly managed a vineyard can be very fruitful!

Jesus uses three illustrations to teach three different kinds of relationships believers will have with Him when He is in-absentia.

1st branch (John 15:2a): The proper understanding of the verb is "lift up", not "take away," in order to become fruitful. Think of the picture in Slide 7 where all the branches have been manually lifted up so they can receive adequate light and ventilation. Jesus is probably referring here to situations and trials administered by the Father to strengthen the faith of new believers and stimulate proper growth to maturity.

2<sup>nd</sup> branch (John 15:2b): The verb here was a standard word for pruning. Think of Slide 8 that shows the result of careful pruning—up to 80% of the vine—so that fruit is produced, not just big leafy vines.<sup>1</sup> Pruning here seems to refer to the disciples' growth (sanctification) up to this point. Be aware that in 15:3 John uses the adjectival form of the verb to prune in 15:2b and is usually translated as “clean,” but in this context reflects the result of pruning. Jesus here declares that all in the Upper Room have already been pruned or spiritually grown as they have accompanied Him in the previous several years.

3<sup>rd</sup> branch (John 15:6): This passage is often thought to describe false professing believers or actual believers who lose their salvation. However, if we think of God's parenting of His nation Israel under the Mosaic Covenant and read New Testament passages like 1 Cor. 11:27-30 and Heb. 12:5-8 we understand this third branch to refer to believers who habitually refuse to obey the Word of God and who are severely disciplined to death.

Those who interpret the third branch as an illustration of someone who merely professes belief introduce a spectrum of meaning in John's use of the verb “believe.” Passages like John 2:23-24, and chapter 8 are usually presented as evidence that John does use this verb for a false kind of belief. Doing so, however, unnecessarily distorts the apostle's writing. It is unnecessary because such passages do not require such an interpretation. And it distorts John's clear emphasis that belief in Christ is the entry into eternal life (John 3:14-21). Let's look at these passages carefully.

In John 2:23-25 John reports that many in Jerusalem who heard Jesus and saw the miracles He did, “believed in His name.” This passage also notes that Jesus did not commit Himself to them (the verb translated “commit” is the same word for “believe”). Advocates of a “false faith” meaning in John's writing point out that those who are said to believe here believed falsely because they were just responding to the signs that Jesus did.

Such an interpretation, however, clashes with John's basic methodology in writing this gospel: “these (signs—events reported in the gospel of John) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ . . . and that believing you may have life in His name.”(John 20:3) Belief in Jesus' sign miracles John considers equivalent to believing in His name because the signs reveal His nature.

By not bringing these believers into the circle of His disciples, Jesus obviously did not consider it appropriate at that time given the immediate social upheaval in the Temple. There would be opportunities later. Belief in Christ for salvation doesn't qualify one for a deep relationship unless it is followed by growth.

In John 8 Jesus was primarily arguing with the Pharisees that He had been talking to in 8:3-9. However, John includes a brief excursus of only two verses (8:10-11)

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<sup>1</sup> For this research I am indebted to Dr. Robert Dean, Jr., “Abiding in Christ: A Dispensational Theology of the Spiritual Life (Part 1 of 3),” *Chafer Seminary Theological Journal*, VII (Jan-Mar 2001) 1.

that report his conversation with the lone woman the Pharisees had brought to Him.

(Slide 9) Then in 8:12 John returns to a continuation of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees that continues to 8:29. John again injects another excursus of three verses in 8:30-32 to report that some in the crowd believed during the back-and-forth argument between Jesus and the Pharisees. To these who believed, Jesus briefly told how to grow by abiding in His Word.

Next John switches back to the ongoing argumentation between Jesus and the Pharisees in 8:33-59. It is to the general crowd that Jesus says they are of their father the devil, virtually declaring them to be unbelievers.