

## A summary of John 15:1-17

- 1. The Father must be glorified in everything we do, related to bearing fruit (v8).** This pertains to our relationship with the Lord, and to the matter of bearing fruit. In chapter 15:1-17, Jesus refers to His Father six times (v.1,8,9,10,15,16), identifying Himself as the Son of Man, fully dependent on the Father, as an example for us. The Father is the husbandman or the cultivator, the source. The Son is the true vine, which means that everything else in this world is not true, but, at best, is a shadow. Everything that the Father and Son are doing is with the purpose to bear fruit, to be glorified or expressed. What is fruit? Galatians 5:22-23 mention the fruit of the Spirit, referring to the condition of our heart, our exercise and our growth. For example, we may read the Bible, attend the Lord's table gathering, praise the Lord, participate in the corporate prayers, even participate in the financial grace offering, visit and accompany people, and preach the gospel. As a result, we may grow in life and be perfected. This aspect concerns our own heart. The other aspect, as seen in John 15, concerns the saints and people around us, and their heart. Do they bear fruit? In a sense, God is the one who bears fruit in us and others. In another sense, people themselves are responsible for their own heart. For example, we may preach the gospel to a hundred people. Will everyone believe in Jesus? Indeed, we must be in spirit and one with the Lord when we preach the gospel, but much depends on the condition of the heart of the people who are hearing the word. This aspect is harder. It is so difficult to bear fruit in this aspect, where others' hearts are affected. That may be one reason why the Lord takes away the branches that do not bear fruit, and prunes the branches that bear fruit so that they can bear more fruit. He may arrange the environment in order to perfect us. For example, the world, in vv.18-19, may hate us because we follow Jesus. This is actually a pruning. If we do not experience these challenging situations, we may not grow. In all the pruning work, and our struggle to bear fruit, the Lord must be glorified. If we preach the gospel, if we shepherd people, if we praise the Lord, if we pray, the Father must be glorified.
- 2. Abiding or remaining in the vine, in order to bear remaining fruit (vv.4-7,16).** In v.2, the Father takes away every branch that does not bear fruit. This may seem that the Father is the One responsible for the taking away of the fruitless branch. On the one hand, this is true. However, if, as branches, we ourselves depart from the vine (Christ and the Christ in the brothers and sisters, or the Body of Christ), then we take ourselves out of the vine or the church life. We cannot blame the Lord. We have a life relationship, not only with the Lord, but also with the saints. If we withdraw, and stay at home, independently, to follow the Lord, we may wither or dry up (v.6) and become useless, or functionless. This does not mean that we lose our salvation. However, in the church life, we may continue to be a "good" brother or sister, even zealous, but we may not bear remaining fruit. The same Greek word is used for "remaining fruit: (v.16) as "abide" in me (v.4). If we remain with the Lord, if we remain in the **logos** word of God, so that we may eventually receive the **rhema** word (God's speaking to us), if we remain with the brothers and sisters, if remain or abide in the teaching and fellowship of the Lord's servants, if we are not independent of other churches, but willing to learn from others, and seeking to see how the Lord can bless even more our own locality, the people that we are accompanying may remain. However, there is no guarantee. It is always a losing battle. According to our observations, an average of one out of a thousand tracts distributed will result in someone believing in Jesus, or coming into the church life. How hard it is for someone to enter into the church life and remain. Only if we "remain" can others have a remote possibility of remaining.

- 3. Abiding in the Lord's love, having the assurance that He loves us, and keeping His commandments (v.9,10,12,14,17).** Do we have the assurance that the Lord loves us? We may agree abstractly that the Lord loves us, but do we really believe it? When we are in a comfortable situation, we may confidently claim that the Lord loves us, and even thank the Lord for His love for us. How about when we find ourselves in difficult situations? Will we abide in His love at those times? Actually, the "difficult" situations that we find ourselves in may seem difficult to us, but may not actually be so. Compared to what Jesus or the apostles in the New Testament went through, the "trials" and "hardships" that we go through are nothing. Yet, when we go through them, how easy it is to say that the Lord no longer loves us. If He did, why would He allow these things to happen to us? However, if we know that He does love us, and that the experiences that we go through are for our perfecting and growth, we may then abide in His love, and even keep His commandments. What is His commandment? That we love one another (v.12), even as He has loved us. Many of us, if asked to take an exam on love, will probably get high marks. We may answer all the questions right concerning the definition of love and how to love others. Do we love others? We actually have very little time to love others. We most certainly love our family, and perhaps a few friends. But do we have the time and the inclination to go search for a "lost sheep" on the mountain, and love him? We may talk about love, but we may not practice it. One practical way to love others is to talk to one new person every Sunday morning, during the bread breaking gathering. Another way is to love the children, know their names, one by one, and pray for them, and even serve them. Another way for younger ones to love others is to visit hospitals or orphanages, to come into contact with those who are suffering. This very much concerns our humanity. The Lord Jesus has the highest humanity, and is the best example of someone who loved the Father and loved every human being with whom He came into contact.
- 4. How may we keep the Lord's commandments? Through asking the Father in Jesus' name (v.16).** Do we come to the Lord to ask? What do we ask? Do we ask only concerning our job or our studies? Yes, we need to ask concerning that. But what about the church? What about the brothers and sisters? What about gospel friends? What about the children? If we ask, when was the last time the Lord answered our prayers? Can we point to a specific time that the Lord did so? For example, we may pray to the Lord for the brothers and sisters, perhaps by name. Because we pray, the Lord may then ask us to contact them (v.16), to send us forth to find them. Do we go? Do we obey His *rhema* word to us? In other words, do we keep His commandments? Do we continue to abide in such a word, and do we continue to pray to the Lord for them? This is not easy. How many times do we pray, and then go to contact someone for a while, and then give up because we are too busy, or they are not open, instead of contacting other people? This may indicate that we do not keep the Lord's commandments. To keep, in Greek, means to guard or hold on to. We must seek the Lord in order to continue to keep His commandments.
- 5. Laying down our life (soul life) for friends (vv.13-15).** Jesus laid down His life (*psuche*, or soul life) for us sinners, whom He called "friends." In Greek, such a word means "close associate" or "companion." However, in Matthew 26:50, Jesus called Judas His friend, but the Greek word there means "clansman" or "comrade," less intimate than John 15. This shows that Jesus died even for Judas, the one who ate bread at His table (Psalm 41:9), and who betrayed Him. What about us? Can we pray for one or two children? On Lord's day, can we talk to one person we do not know? It is easy to talk to those we know (our companions or close associates), but very hard to talk to someone we do not know (comrades).