

# The Spiritual Vine

by Thomas Watson

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*Jesus Christ is the true spiritual vine, and those who are engrafted into Him through faith will receive His blessings and fruit.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 54:10, John 6:54, John 15:1, Romans 5:9, 2 Corinthians 6:10, Ephesians 1:6, Colossians 3:3, Hebrews 5:14, 1 Peter 1:5

**Topics:** "Union With Christ", "Sanctification"

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## Description

Thomas Watson preaches about Jesus Christ as the spiritual vine, using various metaphors to illustrate His beauty, fullness, and virtues. Believers are compared to branches of the vine, receiving grace, promises, and virtues from Christ. Those who are not united with Christ miss out on His fullness and face the consequences of living and dying in sin. Watson emphasizes the importance of being real branches of the spiritual Vine, highlighting faith as the engrafting grace and the vital and sanctifying influences received from Christ. He encourages believers to find comfort in being part of the true Vine, assuring them of God's love, protection, and eternal life.

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## Transcript

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"I am the true vine." John 15:1

"Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth--for Your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of Your perfumes; Your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the maidens love You!" Song of Songs 1:2-3. Jesus Christ is the beauty of heaven--and the joy of the heart, Revelation 21:23. In Him all the fullness dwells, Colossians 1:19. In this flower, is all sweetness. If the gospel is the field, Christ is the treasure hidden in it. The knowledge of Christ is so precious and delectable that, though Paul knew Him before--yet he desired to know more of Him. He would have more light from this sun. "That I may know Him," Philippians 3:10, as he who has found a gold mine desires to dig out still more gold.

Jesus Christ in Scripture is set out by several metaphors.

He is compared to the "rose of Sharon," Song of Solomon 2:1. The rose is the queen of flowers. So sweet is this rose of the heavenly paradise, that it makes us a sweet savor to God, Ephesians 1:6.

Christ is compared to "a pearl of great price," Matthew 13:46. Other pearls add no real worth to those who wear them; but Christ, this illustrious pearl, does! He makes us worthy through His worthiness, Ezekiel 16:14.

But among all the metaphors and allegories in Scripture, none are more lively reveals and sets out the beauty of Christ, than this one of "the vine." He calls Himself here "the true vine." The vine, said Pliny, is to be ranked the highest among all the plants that grow.

DOCTRINE 1. Jesus Christ is a spiritual vine. The analogies are these:

The vine is, of itself, weak and must be supported and borne up. Just so, the human nature of Christ was, of itself, weak and needed to be supported and under-propped with the Divine nature.

The vine grows in the garden not in the forest; so Christ, this blessed Vine, grows in the garden of the church. He is not known among the heathen; they, being forest ground, are not the better for this vine.

The vine communicates to the branches. Believers are called "branches of the vine," verse 5. Christ shoots up His sap of grace into these branches. "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another," John 1:16. Then let not the branches grow proud; all comes from the root of the vine. The saints' gifts and graces are derived from Christ; therefore, He calls the spouse's graces His graces. "I have gathered my myrrh," not your myrrh, Song of Solomon 5:1. The branch has nothing, but what it receives from the root.

The vine has rare delicious fruit growing on it; it bears sweet clusters. The promises are the clusters of grapes growing on Christ, the true Vine. The promises are said to be in Him, 2 Corinthians 1:20. The promises are made in Christ, and grow upon Him as fruit on the tree.

There are many things about the vine useful besides the fruit. The leaves which grow on it, said Pliny, have a physical virtue to allay fevers and inflammations; the gum that distills from it is good against leprosy. So it is with this spiritual Vine, the Lord Jesus. He is exceedingly useful and full of virtue. There is virtue in His sufferings, resurrection, and intercession. He pleads for us, as the advocate for the client. He perfumes our holy things with His incense. Christ's prayer is the cause why our prayers are accepted. Such various excellency is in this Vine.

See the different virtues in Christ to the godly and the wicked. To the godly, He is a Vine full of comfort; to the wicked, he is not a Vine--but a Rock of offense. The godly feed on Him; the wicked stumble on Him. The wicked are offended at the baseness of Christ's person, the spirituality of His doctrine, and the strictness of His laws; but to the godly, He is a Vine yielding most fragrant, delicious fruit.

See the misery of men living and dying in sin. They are not implanted into Christ; therefore, they do not at all partake of His various fullness. The vine communicates influence only to its own branches. The wild olive tree has no fruit from the vine. Such as abide in the old stock of nature, branches of the wild olive, have no benefit from Christ. It is cold comfort to the reprobate part of the world, that there is a Vine growing which bears the fruit of salvation. As long as they remain strangers to Christ and hate to be united with Him--fire will come out of this Vine to devour them!

See the goodness of God! When we had forfeited the fruit of paradise, He gave us a better tree than any which grew there. He has enriched us with a pleasant Vine. When Christ suffered, now was this blessed Vine nailed to the cross; now it was cut and bled; and salvation comes to us in the blood of this Vine. The

gleaning grapes here--are better than the world's vintage. This spiritual Vine cheers the heart, Psalm 104:15. Are we sad in the sense of our sins, and think ourselves unworthy to the Lord's table? This wine of Christ's blood is a cordial. It is both the price and seal of our pardon.

Also, the vine has a strengthening virtue. So, by tasting the fruit of this Vine--we renew our strength. In the holy celebration of the Lord's Supper, fresh influence and nourishment is communicated to us. This spiritual Vine invigorated the saints and martyrs of old, and infused a spirit of magnanimity into them.

That I may raise the saints' esteem of Christ, and that they may come to the sacred supper with more eagerness to drink His blood, I shall show wherein this true Vine surpasses in glory all other vine trees.

1. In the vine, there is something not useful. Though the fruit of the vine is sweet--yet the wood of the vine is not useful; it is good for nothing. "Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on?" Ezekiel 15:3. But it is not so with Christ; there is nothing in this Vine which is not useful. We have need of Christ's human nature to suffer--and His Divine nature to satisfy. We have need of all of His offices, influences, and privileges. There is nothing in Christ we can be without.

2. There are varieties of vine trees--but there is one true Vine that brings redemption to mankind. The papists would fetch comfort from more besides Christ--from the angels and the virgin Mary. The angels themselves are indebted to this Vine, the Lord Jesus. They are by Christ confirmed in their obedience, so that they cannot fall; and as for the virgin Mary, though she was Christ's mother--yet she calls Christ her Savior, Luke 1:47. The virgin Mary is saved not by bearing the Vine--but by being grafted into the Vine!

3. The vine bears but one sort of fruit--only grapes; but the Lord Jesus bears several sorts of fruit.

This Vine bears the fruit of justification. "Being justified through His blood," Romans 5:9. In justification, there is remission of sin and imputation of righteousness. A believer triumphs more in the imputed righteousness of Christ--than if he had Adam's righteousness in innocence; nay, than if he had the angels' righteousness, for now he has the righteousness of God! 2 Corinthians 5:21. Without this, a sinner is put into a continual fever of conscience; but, by virtue of justification, he arrives at a holy serenity. "Being, justified by faith, we have peace with God," Romans 5:1.

This Vine bears the fruit of sanctification. "He is made to us sanctification," 1 Corinthians 1:30. A man may have pleasant fruits growing in his orchard--and others be never the better for it; but holiness in Christ is diffusive. This fruit is for all the elect; they are made holy with Christ's holiness.

This spiritual Vine bears the fruit of consolation. "His fruit was sweet to my taste," Song of Solomon 2:3. When a believer has tasted some of this fruit from Christ, he has had such transfigurations of soul and been filled with such rapturous delight that he could be ready to say as Paul, "Whether in the body I cannot tell." He has been put in heaven before his time.

4. A branch may be cut off and separated from the vine--but no branch shall ever be separated from Christ, this heavenly Vine. Some tell us that a justified person may fall away finally. Is not Christ a perfect Vine? He is not perfect if a living branch may be plucked off from Him. Has not Christ said of His elect, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish--ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand!" John 10:28. If any branch is plucked away from Christ, it is either because Christ is not able to keep it--or because He is willing to lose it. He is surely able to keep it, for He is strengthened with the Godhead; and He is not willing to lose it, for why, then, would He have shed His blood for it? So that no branch shall ever

be separated from the celestial Vine. You may sooner pluck a star out of the sky--than a true believer from Christ. Indeed, hypocrites who look like branches, fall off--but they were never really in the Vine. They were in Christ by profession, not by union. They were tied on to the vine but not engrafted. An elect branch can no more perish than the root!

5. The wine that comes from the true Vine, is better than any other. Wine from the grape delights the palate; but Christ's blood cheers the conscience.

One may take too great a quantity of wine--and then it bites as an adder! But it is otherwise with the wine which Christ gives; we cannot have too much of it, as a man cannot have too much health. Christ's blood is pardoning and pacifying, and the more we drink of it, the better; the deeper it is, the sweeter, Song of Solomon 5:1. The death of the soul is not by drinking too much of Christ's blood--but by refusing to drink.

Wine will cheer a man when he is living, not when he is dead. Wine in a dead man's mouth loses its virtue--but Christ's blood has such a life-giving virtue in it. It so sparkles, and is so full of spirits, that it will fetch life in those that are dead. If they are dead in sin, the blood of Christ makes them revive. "He who drinks My blood has eternal life," John 6:54.

The wine which comes from the grape only cheers man's heart--but that wine that is distilled from Christ, the heavenly Vine, cheers God's heart. The Lord smelled a sweet savor in the wine of God's blood, and was so infinitely pleased and delighted with it--that for this He spared all His people.

USE. Labor to be real branches of this spiritual Vine. What was the old world the better--to hear of an ark unless they got into the ark? So, what are we the better to hear of a Vine unless we are in this Vine?

QUESTION. How shall we know that we are in this Vine?

ANSWER 1. By being engrafted into the Vine. Faith is the engrafting grace. And herein, faith has a peculiar excellency above other graces. Other graces make us like Christ--but faith makes us one with Christ. Other graces make us living pictures of Christ--but faith makes us living branches of Christ. By love and humility we imitate Christ--but by faith we are implanted into Him, as the scion is engrafted into the tree. Let us, therefore, examine whether we have this engrafting grace. Faith admires Christ's beauty, confides in His merits, and submits to His laws. Faith gives up its will, its love, and its life to Christ. Faith has two hands; with one it takes Christ for its sin-offering, with the other it gives up itself to Christ as a burnt-offering.

ANSWER 2. We may know we are in the Vine by receiving influence from the Vine.

A vital influence. "The Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it," John 5:21. And this life from Christ is evidenced by feeling. We are sensible of the first ebullitions and risings of corruption, Romans 7:23, and of the least ebbings of grace. "Who have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil," Hebrews 5:14.

A sanctifying influence. The root of this Vine, being holy, makes all the branches holy. Has Christ diffused some of His divine unction into us? Are our hearts consecrated? Do we set ourselves against every evil--as against poison? Do we forsake sin not only out of policy--but antipathy? Are we, by the power of grace, transformed and made partakers of the Divine nature? Are we meek, humble, and zealous? Is the frame of our heart spiritual? Does our pulse still beat after God? Is our aim sincere? Do we not only advance God's glory--but aim at God's glory? Behold here, a sanctifying virtue derived from Christ into us!

We need not doubt but we are branches of the true Vine--and shall grow and flourish in Him to eternity!

Also, you who are believers stand and wonder that, when you were by nature the vine of Sodom, Deuteronomy 32:32, a vine wallowing in your blood, Ezekiel 19:10, a wild vine which not only cumbered the ground, but poisoned it--that God should take such degenerate branches and plant you into Christ, and make you partake of the spiritual juice and fat of this Vine! Oh, the unfathomable depth of God's love!

You who are the branches of this Vine, let me beseech you to love the Vine which bears you--kiss and embrace Christ! Let your souls sound forth hallelujahs to the whole Trinity. Admire God the Father in sending a Vine from heaven; admire God the Son who was a bleeding Vine for you; admire God the Holy Spirit who has, by His mighty power, implanted you into this Vine. Turn all your sullen discontentments, into triumphant songs! You who were once dead--are now made living branches! You who were once unclean--are now made holy branches! You who once brought forth thistles--you now bear luscious grapes! Oh, make melody in your hearts to the Lord! Admire and celebrate free grace! It is well that there is an eternity coming--and that will be little enough time to praise God!

USE. Here is consolation to all who are implanted into Christ, this spiritual Vine. Let the times be what they will, you have never so much cause to be sad--as you have to rejoice. "As sorrowful--yet always rejoicing," 2 Corinthians 6:10. Hearken to me, you branch of Christ. What if you have little in the world, seeing you partake of the blessing of the Vine, even of all the fullness of God, Ephesians 3:19.

What if you are reproached? It is honor enough that you are in Christ. This Vine, being a plant of renown, casts a glory upon all the branches, Isaiah 28:5. What if you are told by the tempter, that Christ does not love you? You may reply, "I am engrafted into Christ! The holy sap of His grace is infused into me!"

What if you are are persecuted? Be of good cheer; you have a life hidden in the Vine. "Your life is hidden with Christ," Colossians 3:3. Fear not. If you cannot live without molestation in this earthly wilderness, you shall grow in paradise! When Basil was threatened with banishment, he comforted himself with this, "Either I shall be under heaven or in heaven." Oh, how may all the branches of the true Vine flourish with joy! Let death come, they may triumph. Death shall destroy sin--and perfect grace!

In particular, there is COMFORT to all the real branches of Christ in these four cases:

1. It is comfort under fear of spiritual barrenness. "I am

afraid," says the saint, "that I shall grow dead at last and be like that barren fig tree in the gospel, which was cursed." But, for your comfort, know that the branches of this spiritual Vine never cease yielding fruit. Indeed, ordinary vine trees, though they are, for a time, fruitful--yet, when they grow old, they grow barren; but the branches of the true Vine are never so old as to be past bearing fruit. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age," Psalm 92:14. Believers, the longer they live--the more they live of faith, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, the more they are perfumed with Christ's love. The church of Thyatira, the older she grew, the better she grew. Her last works were more than her first, Revelation 2:19. What a great deal of fruit, did Paul bring forth not long before his death! This light shone brighter before his setting. "I labored more abundantly than they all," 1 Corinthians 15:10. As long as there is a fullness in Christ, believers shall not lack. This holy Vine, being replenished with sap, the branches cannot fail to be fertile. "Because I live--you shall live also," John 14:19. Because the root lives, therefore the branches shall flourish with fruit!

2. It is comfort in wrongs and injuries, especially when endured for Christ's sake. The Lord Jesus is sensible of this, and will one day vindicate His people. The Vine is sensible of all the injury done to the branches. "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people," Acts 7:34. Not only have I seen them with an eye of inspection--but affection. Christ bleeds in the saints' wounds. He who knows their sufferings, feelingly will avenge them speedily.

3. It is comfort under fear of falling away. "I am afraid," said a Christian, "that I shall tire before I get to heaven. Either I shall be blown down by Satan's temptations--or faint under sufferings." Oh, remember you are a branch in Christ, and you cannot be broken off! Adam, when he grew upon his own root of innocence, withered; but you grow upon Christ's root. Therefore, your grace shall flourish into perseverance. Though you are but as a branch which hangs on a tree--you will never drop off because Christ holds you! It is not your holding Christ--but His holding you, which preserves you. He repels the force of temptation, overpowers the remains of indwelling corruption, and increases the spark of grace. "We are kept by the power of God," 1 Peter 1:5. The Greek word means "kept as in a garrison."

4. It is comfort when the world hates us. Jerome blessed God that he was counted worthy, to be one whom the world hated. What if you are maligned and hated? God loves all the branches of the true Vine; nay, He loves them as He loves the root. "That the world may know that You have loved them--as You have loved Me," John 17:23. It is the same love for kind, though not degree.

God the Father loved Christ from eternity. "You love Me before the foundation of the world," John 17:24. And so He loves believers. "He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world," Ephesians 1:4. Our love to God began late. We may remember the time when we had no love in our hearts sparkling towards God. But God's love to us, bears date from eternity.

God's love to Christ is a love of immutability, and so it is to believers. The sun of electing love, having risen upon them--never sets. Death may take away their life--but not God's love. "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:10. The Lord may change His love into a frown--but He will never change His love into hatred. God can no more hate a believer than He can Christ, for a believer is part of Christ. He is Christ-mystical. What a comfort is this! God loves the branches as much as He loves the Root, and the fruit of God's love to the elect branches, appears in two things:

In pruning them. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." John 15:1-2. He prunes them by affliction. We are apt to think that, when God afflicts us, He does not love us. A farmer loves his vine never a whit less, because he prunes it. Affliction is God's pruning knife. He prunes us to make us bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, Hebrews 12:11. God would rather have the branches bleed, than be barren. All this is love. It is God's love, that He will rather lop and prune the branches than let them grow wild.

In transplanting them to heaven. The branches of Christ will thrive best when they are transplanted; and good reason, because then they will grow in a better soil. Christ desires to have all His branches, which are scattered up and down in the world, to be with Him. "Father, I desire those You have given Me to be with Me where I am." John 17:24. The elect will never be happy--until they are transplanted to the heavenly garden; then they will grow quietly. In heaven, there will be no bramble to tear the vine branches; none of the red dragon's race. Then all the branches will be sweetly united in love. Then they shall grow in

the sunshine. God's countenance will be ever shining upon them. In this life, they partake of God's grace; hereafter, they shall partake of His glory!

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