

## John: 15:4–8

### From Catena Aurea:

4. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

6. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

7. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. lxxvi non occ.) Having said that they were clean through the word which He had spoken unto them, He now teaches them that they must do their part.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tract. lxxxi. 1) Abide in Me, and I in you: not they in Him, as He in them; for both are for the profit not of Him, but them. The branches do not confer any advantage upon the vine, but receive their support from it: the vine supplies nourishment to the branches, takes none from them: so that the abiding in Christ, and the having Christ abiding in them, are both for the profit of the disciples, not of Christ; according to what follows, As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. Great display of grace! He strengtheneth the hearts of the humble, stoppeth the mouth of the proud. They who hold that God is not necessary for the doing of good works, the subverters, not the assertors, of free will, contradict this truth. For he who thinks that he bears fruit of himself, is not in the vine; he who is not in the vine, is not in Christ; he who is not in Christ, is not a Christian.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tract. lxxxi. 3) But lest any should suppose that a branch could bring forth a little fruit of itself, He adds, For without Me ye can do nothing. He does not say, ye can do little. Unless the branch abides in the vine, and lives from the root, it can bear no fruit whatever. Christ, though He would not be the vine, except He were man, yet could not give this grace to the branches, except He were God.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. lxxvi. 1) The Son then contributes no less than the Father to the help of the disciples. The Father changeth, but the Son keepeth them in Him, which is that which makes the branches fruitful. And again, the cleansing is attributed to the Son also, and the abiding in the root to the Father who begat the root. (c. 2.). It is a great loss to be able to do nothing, but He goes on to say more than this: If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, i. e. shall not benefit by the care of the husbandman, and withereth, i. e. shall lose all that it desires from the root, all that supports its life, and shall die.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tract. lxxx. 3) For the branches of the vine are as contemptible, if they abide not in the vine, as they are glorious, if they abide. One of the two the branch must be in, either the vine, or the fire: if it is not in the vine, it will be in the fire.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. lxxvi. 2) Then He shews what it is to abide in Him. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. It is to be shewn by their works.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Tract. lxxx. 4) For then may His words be said to abide in us, when we do what He has commanded, and love what He has promised. But when His words abide in the memory, and are not found in the life, the branch is not accounted to be in the vine, because it derives no life from its root. So far as we abide in the Saviour we cannot will any thing that is foreign to our salvation. We have one will, in so far as we are in Christ, another, in so far as we are in this world. And by reason of our abode in this world, it sometimes happens that we ask for that which is not expedient, through ignorance. But never, if we abide in Christ, will He grant it us, Who does not grant except what is expedient for us. And here we are directed to the prayer, Our Father. Let us adhere to the words and the meaning of this prayer in our petitions, and whatever we ask will be done for us.

## **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

### **15:4 Reciprocal Abiding of Branch and Vine**

#### **The Vine as a Living Parable.**

Ambrose: It seems clear, therefore, that the example of the vine is designed, as this passage indicates, for the instruction of our lives. It is observed to bud in the mild warmth of early spring, and next to produce fruit from the joints of the shoots from which a grape is formed. This gradually increases in size, but it still retains its bitter taste. When, however, it is ripened and mellowed by the sun, it acquires its sweetness.

Meanwhile, the vine is decked in green leaves by which it is protected in no slight manner from frosts and other injuries and is defended from the sun's heat. Is there any spectacle that is more pleasing or any fruit that is sweeter? What a joy to behold the rows of hanging grapes like so many jewels of a beautiful countryside, to pluck those grapes gleaming in colors of gold and purple!... Let them praise you who behold you, and let them admire the marshaled bands of the church like the serried rows of vine branches. Let everyone among the faithful gaze on the gems of the soul. Let them find delight in the maturity of prudence, in the splendor of faith, in the charm of Christian affirmation, in the beauty of justice, in the fecundity of pity, so that it may be said of you, "Your wife is a fruitful vine on the sides of your house," because you imitate by the exercise of your abundant and generous giving the bountiful return of a fruit-bearing vine. Six Days of Creation 3.12.52.

### **The Spirit Nourishes the Fruit.**

Cyril of Alexandria: Unless the branch is provided with the life-producing sap from its mother the vine, how will it bear grapes or what fruit will it bring forth—and from what source?... For no fruit of virtue will spring up anew in those of us who have fallen away from intimate union with Christ. To those, however, who are joined to the one who is able to strengthen them and who nourishes them in righteousness, the capacity to bear fruit will readily be added by the provision and grace of the Spirit, which is like a life-producing water. Commentary on the Gospel of John 10.2.

### **Christ Nourishes with the Spirit.**

Cyril of Alexandria: Just as the root of the vine administers and distributes to the branches the benefit of its own natural and inherent qualities, so too the only-begotten Word of God imparts to the saints, as it were, a likeness to his own nature and the nature of God the Father by giving them the Spirit, inasmuch as they have been united with him through faith and perfect holiness. Christ nourishes them in piety and works in them the knowledge of all virtue and good works. Commentary on the Gospel of John 10.2.

### **The Branches Benefit More Than the Vine.**

Augustine: Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you." They are not in him in the same kind of way that he is in them. And yet both ways tend to their advantage, not to his. For the relation of the branches to the vine is such that they contribute nothing to the vine but derive their own means of life from it, while that of the vine to the branches is such that it supplies their vital nourishment and receives nothing from them. And so their having Christ abiding in them and abiding themselves in Christ are in both respects advantageous not to Christ but to the disciples. For when the branch is cut off, another may spring up

from the living root. But that which is cut off cannot live apart from the root. Tractates on the Gospel of John 81.1.

### **15:5a I Am the Vine, You Are the Branches**

#### **The Vine of Naphtali Foreshadowed Christ and the Cross.**

Ambrose: [The spreading vine of Naphtali] is a beautiful reference to a shoot clinging to a spiritual vine, of which we are the branch and can bear fruit if we remain on the vine. But otherwise we are cut off. The holy patriarch Naphtali was an abundant shoot. This explains why Jacob had called him a spreading vine. That is, through the grace of faith he was stripped of the bonds of death, and the people of God are foreshadowed in him, called to the liberty of faith and to the fullness of grace and spread over the whole world. It clothes the crossbeam of Christ with good fruit and encompasses the wood of that true vine, that is, the mysteries of the Lord's cross. It does not fear the danger of acknowledging him, but rather, even amid persecutions, it glories in the name of Christ. On the Patriarchs 10.42–3.

### **15:5b Apart from Me You Can Do Nothing**

#### **We Could Do Nothing Without God.**

Maximus the Confessor: The Lord told us, "Outside of me you can do nothing." This is because our weakness, when moved to do good things, is unable to bring anything to completion without the giver of good things. The one who has come to understand the weakness of human nature has had experience of the divine power. And such a person who because of divine power has succeeded in some things and is eager to succeed in others never looks down on anyone. For he knows that in the same way that God has helped him and freed him from many passions and hardships, so can he help everyone when he wishes, especially those who are striving for his sake. The Four Hundred Chapters on Love 2.38–39.

#### **Branches Do Nothing Apart from the Vine.**

Prosper of Aquitaine:

Hope is not in the fading flower of the field.

For just as no one is able to eat the fruit of the branch

Unless the branch remains in the vine which brings

Sap to the leaves from the root and fills the grapes with must—

So also those who are barren in virtue and without fruit  
Shall be fuel for the perpetual fire: those who leave the vine  
Dare to put their faith in the immoderate liberty of the leaves,  
So that their fruitfulness is not dependent on the fruitfulness of Christ:  
And even more, they believe they are able to excel on their own,  
As if God is not the author of the virtues that please him....  
[But] why would they be ashamed, especially in this valley of tears,  
If their power came from God, that they have a minimum of mortal works,  
When it is nothing but sin which has destroyed  
Liberty to which alone evil deeds recur?  
And yet, when we focus the mind on holy acts,  
When a chaste mind refuses carnal desires,  
When we do not give in to temptations, and through harsh  
Vexing punishments, we remain in our hearts unyielding;  
Then we are acting freely; but with a freedom redeemed,  
And over which God is ruler as light from the highest light, [there is]  
Life, health, virtue, wisdom: It is the grace of Christ  
By which freedom runs, rejoices, endures, takes care, chooses, stands,  
Believes, hopes, loves, is cleansed and is justified.  
For if we are right in anything we do, Lord, we do it only with your help;  
You move hearts, you command prayers—those you want to grant you bestow, bestowing  
Lavishly and producing merit from merits and enriching the gifts of your crown.  
But this does not mean I should diminish my care and become lax in the pursuit of virtue, or

Become complacent by letting mental apathy hold sway,

Because the good works of the saints are yours,

And whatever in them is pure or strong, depends on you:

So that none of the actions of human beings is seen as occurring entirely apart from your will:

For without you what is achieved by the will except to be exiled far away from you?

The paths are always precipitous and the ways twisting

When advancing alone: When our will is exhausted, you are kind; when feeble

You lift it up, you carry it back, you keep it warm, you watch over it and provide it with dignity.

Then it will make rapid progress, its eyes actually seeing, its freedom free, its wisdom wise,

Its justice just, its virtue strong and its senses healed.

On the Ungrateful People 954–97.

### **Grace.**

Augustine: A great encomium on grace, my brothers—one that will instruct the souls of the humble and stop the mouths of the proud! Let those now answer it, if they dare, who, ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. Let the self-complacent answer who think they have no need of God for the performance of good works.... They say, It is of God that we have our existence as human beings, but it is of ourselves that we are righteous. What is it you say, you who deceive yourselves and, instead of establishing free will, cast it headlong down from the heights of its self-elevation through the empty regions of presumption into the depths of an ocean grave? Why, your assertion that a person of himself works righteousness, that is the height of your self-elation.... For whoever imagines that he is bearing fruit of himself is not in the vine, and whoever is not in the vine is not in Christ, and whoever is not in Christ is not a Christian. Such are the ocean depths into which you have plunged.

Look further into what the Truth has to say.... For just to keep anyone from supposing that the branch can bear at least some little fruit of itself, after saying, "the same brings forth much fruit," his next words are not, without me you can do but little, but "you can do nothing." Whether then it is a little or a lot, without him it is impracticable. For without him nothing can be done. For although, when the branch bears little

fruit, the husbandman purges it that it may bring forth more, yet if it does not abide in the vine and draw its life from the root, it can bear no fruit whatever of itself. And although Christ would not have been the vine had he not been man, yet he could not have supplied such grace to the branches had he not also been God. Tractates on the Gospel of John 81.2–3.

#### **In the Face of Pride.**

Mark the Hermit: When you have done something good, remember the words, “without me you can do nothing.” On the Spiritual Law 41.

#### **15:6 Destroying Dead Branches**

#### **15:7 Abide in the Word, Then Ask**

#### **The One Who Has the Word Lacks Nothing.**

Clement of Alexandria: He who has the almighty God, the Word, lacks nothing and never is in dire straits for what he needs. For the Word is a possession that lacks nothing and is the cause of all abundance. If someone says that he has often seen the righteous person in need of food, this is rare, and it happens only where there is not another righteous person. Notwithstanding, let him read what follows: “For the righteous one shall not live by bread alone but by the word of the Lord,” who is the true bread, the bread of the heavens. The good person, then, can never be in difficulties so long as he keeps intact his confession toward God. For it belongs to him to ask and to receive whatever he requires from the Father of all and to enjoy what is his own if he keeps the Son. And he also should feel that he lacks nothing. Christ the Educator 3.7.

#### **Abiding Is More Than Acknowledging God’s Existence.**

Cyril of Alexandria: Shall we say that faith bare and alone is sufficient for one to attain the fellowship that is from above—will even the band of demons rise up to fellowship with God, since they acknowledge God’s unity and have believed that God exists? How could this be? For the mere knowledge that the one God is the creator and producer of all things is useless. But I think it necessary that the confession of piety toward God should accompany faith. For one who does this abides in Christ and will be seen to possess his words, according to the text in the book of Psalms, “I have laid up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” Commentary on the Gospel of John 10.2.

### **Abiding in Christ Governs What You Desire.**

Augustine: “If you abide in me,” he says, “and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.” For when someone abides in Christ in this way, is there anything he or she can wish for besides what will be agreeable to Christ? When they abide in the Savior in this way, can they wish for anything that is inconsistent with salvation? Some things, indeed, we wish for because we are in Christ, and other things we desire because we are still in this world. For at times, in connection with our present living quarters, we are inwardly prompted to ask what we know would not be expedient for us to receive. But God forbid that such a thing should be given to us if we abide in Christ, who, when we ask, only does what will be for our advantage. Abiding in him when his words abide in us, we shall ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. For if we ask, and the doing does not follow, what we ask must not be connected with our abiding in him or with his words that abide in us. Instead they must be connected with that craving and infirmity of the flesh that are not in him and do not have his words abiding in them. For to his words, at all events, belongs that prayer that he taught and in which we say, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Let us only not fall away from the words and meaning of this prayer in our petitions, and whatever we ask shall be done unto us. For his words may only be said to abide in us when we do what he has commanded us and love what he has promised. But when his words abide only in the memory and have no place in your life, the branch is not in the vine because it does not draw its life from the root. Tractates on the Gospel of John 81.4.

### **15:8 Bearing Much Fruit Our Lives by God’s Grace Bring Glory to God.**

Augustine: The Savior, in thus speaking to the disciples, commends still more and more the grace whereby we are saved when he says, “By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and be made my disciples.” Whether we say glorified or made bright, both are the translation of one Greek verb, namely, doxazein. For what is doxa in Greek is “gloria” in Latin. I have thought it worthwhile to mention this because the apostle says, “If Abraham was justified by works, he has glory, but not before God.” For this is the glory before God, whereby God, and not man [humankind], is glorified, when man is justified, not by works, but by faith, so that even his doing well is imparted to him by God. Just as the branch, as I have stated above, cannot bear fruit of itself. For if God the Father is glorified in this, that we bear much fruit and are made the disciples of Christ, let us not credit this to our own glory, as though we had it from ourselves. For such grace is from him, and the glory in this is therefore not ours but his. And so, in another passage, after saying, “Let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works”—to keep them from the thought that such good works were of themselves—he immediately added, “and may



glorify your Father who is in heaven.” For here is where the Father is glorified, that we bear much fruit and are made the disciples of Christ. And by whom are we so made, but by him whose mercy has preceded us? For “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Tractates on the Gospel of John 82.1.