



I love grapes. They are so beautiful and graceful. I love to see them as they hang in a grape arbor; their shades beautifully varied, their spacing at differing angles. Some seem to ripen sooner than others.

Grapes.

Lots of thoughts come to mind when one thinks of grapes, don't they? One of them has to be wine, another grape juice. What would you think of if I asked you to study the picture below and think about the word "vine?"



For those of us who are lovers of Jesus, our thoughts go straight to Christ's declaration,

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. [John 15:5](#)*

We might also be reminded of this:

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vineyard keeper. [John 15:1](#)*

It's easy to look at these clusters of grapes and comprehend how essential it is for them to remain fastened to the vine, isn't it. It doesn't take a rocket scientist or a vineyard owner to know that if a single grape detaches itself from that vine, it will fall to the ground, there to be trampled by something or else eaten by some creature or another

Do you suppose that there are various grades of grapes? I think there must be. Not too long ago I got a hankering for some green grapes. The next time I went to the local grocery store, I found a beautiful bunch of them packaged by a major produce companies in America. I gleefully bought the biggest bag I could get and took them home. I ate supper with nothing in my mind

but finishing it, and getting to that moment when I could eat some grapes! Grapes! The very thought of them made my mouth water..... Ummmm. But I was in for a big surprise!

After breaking off a sprig and rinsing them in water, I carefully placed them in a little dish and sat down to enjoy them. I lifted that first beautiful little fruit to my lips and took a happy little bite. I almost immediately began yodeling in French, a language I never learned! That thing was the bitterest little grape I had ever put in my mouth! The next day back they went to the store for a refund. Disappointedly I went to a larger grocery in a nearby town (I live in the country where the town closest to me has exactly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a grocery!) This time I TASTED their grape offerings. Much to my surprise they were as sweet as ever a grape should be. Needless to say, a second nice bag was brought home and delicately enjoyed to the very end.

So what about these grapes? I'm not well versed on grape growing, but I would think that there must be certain vineyards whose grapes are sweeter than others. Perhaps it is due to the soil in which they are grown. Perhaps it is because of the unique combination of fertilizers used to enhance the soil. I really don't know. I only know that two bags, each sold under a different major brand name can be as different as bitter is to sweet.

That got me thinking about us. Jesus told His followers to abide in Him, to stay plugged into Him. When God describes the fruit of His Spirit, that is to say, the flavor His Spirit injects, as it were, into those who abide in Him, they sound very desirable and pleasing -- love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. Listen to how it is described in the Message:

*But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard - things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments... Galatians 5:22*

So how does this apply to you and me? May I suggest that we would do well to make certain, first of all, that we are in fact attached to the Vine who is Jesus. And then, it would seem that it would really bless Him and others if we let Him raise us the way He wants to -- pruning us, culling us, fertilizing us, letting His rain and His sun shine on us. It would seem that if we are willing to let Him have His full way with us that we will become sweet fruit. Sweet to Him and sweet to those who drink the juice (the water) that flows from our bellies. What? Yes, we each have streams of water flowing from out of us, some bitter, some sweet.

All of us are aware of "brethren" within the family of faith whose mouths are something less than sweet. They seem to think that one of their spiritual gifts is criticizing others, or cutting others down. They might be experts in knowing the "four spiritual laws," and they may never be seen "doing the don'ts," but the fruit of their lips is death rather than life.

Take one more look at this vine. And let's examine our own personal lives. Jesus, if I'm really connected to you, your life-giving vocabulary of grace and mercy should flow from my lips. I should be as encouraging and gracious to everyone as You, Lord, are to me.

Lord, would You, along with me, examine my heart and know me. Try me, Lord. Test me in this matter. Lord, appear before me as my husband, or as my wife, or as my children. Lord, appear to me looking like my neighbor or my Pastor. Then listen carefully, Lord, to my words, and let's see if Your grace really does flow from me. Jesus, you said that

*He that believeth in me, as the scripture saith: **Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.***  
*John 7:38*

Lord, that only happens when I honestly abide in You. This will happen when I stay close to you enough that I become completely convinced that you find me so lovable I have no need to prove I'm better or holier than anyone else by putting them down.

Lord, since out of the fullness of the heart comes words, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, and in Your ears. I love you, Lord. Thank you, my Vine. Thank you for grapes. Lord, make me a sweet one!

