

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Abiding in the Vine, Part 2

REVIEW

Jesus is in the Upper Room in John 15. He speaks about two types of disciples: the eleven before Him who are real disciples and Judas, who has gone to betray Him. In this context, He draws an allegory of the vine and the branches. He is the vine, the Father is the vinedresser, and the branches are followers of Jesus--some of them are real and some are not. He tells us that you can discern which followers are true believers because they will bear fruit, obey, continue in His love, and remain in a close relationship with Him. False believers do none of those things and only follow Jesus temporarily. That is why Christ warns superficial followers of the terrible tragedy of being around Him like Judas, but not being saved.

The imperative to abide is an exhortation to unbelievers, yet it also applies to Christians. In a positional sense, we do abide in Christ--that is the character of being saved. But there's a sense in which Christians fail to abide as fully as they ought to. We're always in fellowship with the Father and the Son, because fellowship means partnership, and nothing can ever break that if we're saved. However, we lose the joy and the experience of that fellowship when we temporarily cease to abide in a close relationship with Christ.

A man has two choices: He can be a Christian, one who truly abides in Christ; or he can be an unbeliever, one who fails to bear fruit, continue in Christ's love, obey His commands, and therefore ends up in an ultimate and eternal disaster. I want to examine the consequences of being a true branch connected to Christ and the consequences of being one that is cast aside. If you are struggling between giving your life to Jesus Christ or keeping your distance from Him and just being religious, I hope you will choose Christ, perhaps even as a result of this study.

I. THE BASIC MEANING OF ABIDING (vv. 4, 8-10)

II. THE BLESSINGS OF ABIDING (vv. 5, 7-8, 11)

A true disciple, one who really commits his life to Jesus Christ, is blessed. The one who has a loving relationship with Christ and in whom Christ dwells is the one through whom Christ bears fruit gives blessings.

A. The Fruit of Believers (v. 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."

There can't be any fruit on a branch that doesn't remain on the vine. Only an abiding branch will bring forth good fruit. So every Christian bears fruit; there is no such thing as a fruitless Christian. Jesus said, "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:17). Jesus even said you can tell whether a man is saved or not by his fruit: "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). He says basically the same thing in John 15:5. Although it may be difficult to find, there will always be fruit in the life of a believer. There may be lapses when he doesn't experience the fullness of abiding in Christ, but there will be fruit in his life because the indwelling Christ will produce it.

1. Its importance

Fruit is important. You may say, "Why bother with it? If I'm saved, why shouldn't I just hang around until I go to heaven?" Because God wants you to have a productive life, He produces fruit through your life by His own power. Two facts indicate its importance:

a. God's plan

1) Psalm 1:1-3

"Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season." Even in the Old Testament, the godly man was considered a fruit-bearing man. God's life was in him producing fruit.

2) Galatians 5:22-23

The apostle Paul said, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." Fruit is an expected result in the life of a godly man or woman by God's design. It is the product of God's life within believers, whether in the Old Testament or the New.

b. God's power

Fruit is also important because God is its enabling source. A man is not the source of fruit; he's merely the branch. It is God who produces life; it is His power that produces fruit.

1) Hosea 14:8

In the Old Testament God said, "From me is thy fruit found." Fruit is from God, and only the person or the branch that abides in God has the divine resource to bear good fruit.

2) Philippians 1:11

Paul talked about fruit from the standpoint of salvation, saying we're to be "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ." There can't be any righteousness unless a man is born again and receives the righteousness of Christ. The only way you'll ever have fruit is to be saved because the fruit in you is the product of Christ in you. In John 10:37-38, Jesus said that the Father was working through Him.

2. Its identity

a) What it is not

1) Success

Nowhere in the Bible is success ever synonymous with fruit. Some people think that if something is big and there are many people involved in it, it must be produced by God. However, that is no guarantee that it is divinely produced fruit. For example, the ministry of a missionary shouldn't be evaluated solely on the basis of whether it looks like he has been successful. His many years of ministry may have been valuable years of planting and watering (1 Cor. 3:5-8) although they may not show much harvesting. At the same time, successful-looking missionary work may have been the result of fleshly performance with little good fruit. You cannot effectively measure fruit by success.

2) Sensationalism

Not only should you avoid measuring the fruitfulness of a ministry by the number of people who have been won to the Lord or who attend a church, but you should also avoid measuring it by the evidence of emotionalism or zealotry for some program. That's not fruit either.

3) Simulation

True fruit produced by God through us cannot be simulated. There's a subtle danger of some believers trying to do externally what the Spirit of God has produced internally through the lives of other believers. We all aren't the same kind of branch in the sense that we produce the same kind of fruit. Every believer bears fruit that is in a sense unique, though it's common to all of us. It's easy for someone to set out on a course of self-improvement, where he's trying to be like someone else, rather than abiding in Christ and letting God produce the fruit. If a Christian starts simulating someone else's fruit, he has violated the basic principle of abiding by producing artificial fruit. Fruit comes by abiding in Christ.

b) What it is

1) Being Christlike

Fruit can be the virtues of Christlike character. A believer who is like Christ bears fruit. His life is patterned after Christ. That is the implication of Galatians 5:22-23, where Paul said, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control; against such there is no law." All those, without exception, were characteristics of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are to reproduce the life of Christ in us as we abide in Him. Jesus was known by His love, His peace, and His joy, all of which He gave to His disciples (John 14:21, 27; 15:11). Everything He has He gives to those who are His.

You may wonder if there is any spiritual fruit in your life. If there's any love, joy, or peace in your life, the answer is yes. The fruit of the Spirit becomes part of your life only as you abide in Christ. You don't need to work on each of them one at a time. By the time you get to the end of the list, you've probably lost your love, peace, and joy that you worked on first, so you've got to start all over again. What you really need to do is abide in Christ. Be concerned about the quality of your relationship to Jesus and the fruit will come by itself.

2) Praising God

Offering praise to Christ is fruit. Hebrews 13:15 says, "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." A worshipful, thankful spirit is one kind of fruit. When you express adoration to Christ and thank Him for all that He has given you, you are offering Him fruit.

3) Contributing to those in need

We usually don't think about supplying a need for someone as fruit, but it is.

a) Philippians 4:17

The apostle Paul had received a gift from the church at Philippi while he was imprisoned in Rome. He thanked them, saying, "Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." He's saying, "It's not that I want a present; it's that I love to see the fruit of your relationship to Christ."

b) Romans 15:26, 28

Paul considered the financial support given by converted Gentiles to Jewish believers to be fruit of their loving generosity: "It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution

for the poor saints who are at Jerusalem.... When, therefore, I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain." Their monetary gift was representative of their love. A contribution out of love to those in need is a form of spiritual fruit.

4) Communicating spiritual truth

Communicating spiritual truths to someone else is another type of fruit. First Corinthians 14:14 addresses the issue of speaking in tongues while praying: "If I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful." If a Christian prays in a language that no one knows, he is unable to comprehend its meaning and cannot contribute anything to the rest of the church by it. There is no fruit in that. The Christian who is in tune with the Spirit will think of others first and will pray with his understanding that he might impart to them spiritual truth. Communication that blesses others is fruit. This principle may apply in other areas as well. For example, a believer can study the Bible by himself and never bother to share it with anyone else. That's fruitless in the sense that what he has learned is not being communicated to bless other people.

5) Doing good works

In Colossians 1:10, Paul prayed that the Colossians might be fruitful: "Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work." Good works are fruit.

6) Leading others to Christ

People won to Jesus Christ through witnessing are also the fruit of abiding. As you abide in Christ, opportunities will arise and fruit will result. Concentrate on your relationship to Jesus Christ and He'll determine which fruit is ready to be picked. Don't get yourself tied in knots because you haven't led a certain amount of people to the Lord. The way to win people to Jesus Christ is not to be legalistic about it, but to abide in Him.

a) John 4:32-36

On His way to Galilee, Jesus passed through Samaria and met a woman at a well in the village of Sychar. While she went into town to tell the people of her meeting with Jesus, His disciples encouraged Him to eat. "But he said unto them, I have food to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him anything to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My food is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (vv. 32-35). As Jesus spoke these words, He could see the white-robed people from the village of Sychar visible above the tops of the grain in the fields. Continuing His analogy, In verse 36, He said, "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit

unto life eternal." So Jesus identified converts as a kind of fruit.

b) 1 Corinthians 16:15

Paul identified the family of Stephanas as the first converts in Achaia: "I beseech you, brethren (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints)."

c) Romans 1:13

It's possible that Paul was referring to converts when he told the Roman Christians, "I purposed to come unto you ... that I might have some fruit among you."

So Christ enables Christians to bear fruit as they remain intimately involved Him. It's a marvelous thing to realize all the kinds of fruit that Christ produces in us as we abide. If we're not enjoying fruit in our lives, then we aren't abiding as God designed us to.

B. The Faithfulness of God (v. 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."

The faithfulness of God in answering prayer is another blessing of abiding in Christ. God says, "If you are truly an abiding branch, I will be faithful to answer every prayer." That's a fantastic promise! I want you to realize, however, that there are two conditions that allow God to respond:

1. Believing and following Christ (v. 7a)

"If ye abide in me"

The first condition for answered prayer is being a true believer. The word translated "abide" (Gk. meinete) is used here in the aorist tense and implies in this context a permanent fact. You must be a permanently abiding branch--a true believer. The mark of a true Christian is that he abides. Such a person will experience the blessing of having his prayers answered. God is under no obligation, however, to answer the prayers of unbelievers. You ask, "Does God ever answer their prayers?" Yes He does; He may do that in His own sovereign design, but He makes no promises that He will do so, especially in the case of a false believer like Judas.

2. Knowing and obeying God's Word (v. 7b)

"And my words abide in you"

The second condition for answered prayer is letting the Word of God abide in you. If Jesus had commanded you to abide in Him without adding the condition of letting His Word direct your prayers, that would be a blank check signed by God to pray for anything and get it. If you've asked God for many things that He didn't give you, you might check on whether His words are abiding in you. If your life is continually regulated by the God's Word, the Lord will answer your prayers. The "words" (Gk. remata) that Jesus was referring to were His specific utterances, rather than a broader reference to the Bible. The individual words of Christ have to be controlling our lives. It's easy to say we pattern our lives after the Word of God in a general way. However, it is much more difficult to pattern out lives after the practical teaching of Jesus. That involves studying the truths of the Word and obeying God's will. Learning and applying the truths Christ has revealed through the writers of the New Testament makes it possible for God to respond to our prayers because we are being controlled by Christ's words.

Jesus indicated the same principle in John 14:13-14: "Whatever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." When you pray for something in the name of Jesus, it means you pray with Him in mind; it doesn't mean you merely attach the words "in Jesus' name" at the end of your prayers. It means you are praying consistently with the words and the will of Jesus Christ. From another angle, when you get a positive answer to your prayer, you can be sure you have asked according to His Word and will. The Christian who abides in Christ and is being controlled by the Lord's words will not ask anything contrary to the Lord's will because His Word and His will are always consistent.

Your prayers should reflect this spirit: "I'm asking this, Father, because I know it is the will of Jesus Christ. I'm asking this for His sake, knowing He would like it to be done." When you can say that, then you're asking according to His will. Unfortunately, it's very easy to ask for something that's not according to His will. James 4:3 says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." It's one thing to say I want what Jesus wants because my life is controlled by His precepts; it's something completely different to say I want what I desire in spite of what God thinks--that's being independently selfish. But if you meet the two conditions of following Christ and obeying His Word, God will answer every prayer you bring before Him. His faithfulness is a blessed promise!

C. The Glory of the Father (v. 8)

"In this is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

1. Stated

A believer who abides in Christ and bears fruit brings honor to God. Christians are here on this earth to do one thing: to give God the glory that He deserves. Everything that is produced in our lives by the Spirit is fruit that gives glory to the Father--not to us.

2. Supported

a) Romans 15:18

"I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me." Paul didn't go around telling people how good he was; he was only interested in telling about the things that Christ did through him. In Galatians 2:20, Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." As we yield to Him, He fulfills His will through us.

b) 1 Peter 2:12

"[Have] your behavior honest among the Gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God." Whatever is produced in your life by His Spirit gives Him glory. Wouldn't you like to glorify the Father? As you abide in Christ, He can produce more fruit in you so the Father can be further glorified.

D. The Fullness of Joy (v. 11)

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

John 15:1-10, which deals with abiding in Christ, bearing fruit, having your prayers answered, and continuing in Christ's love and obeying Him as true disciples, points to one final climactic blessing: joy. What a tremendous promise! Unfortunately, some think living the Christian life is monastic deprivation, some kind of a bitter religious pill they have to take. Actually, every bit of the Christian life is designed for our joy. However, the Christian who violates the things mentioned in John 15 isn't joyous. If you want full joy, then you must abide in Christ in the fullest sense.

Jesus wanted the joy He experienced in fellowship with the Father to remain in His disciples. In verse 10, He said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." Jesus is the example of the perfect abiding life resulting in full joy. In the midst of all that Jesus suffered, He still had full joy because of His abiding relationship with the Father. When you abide in Him, you'll have the same joy.

When David sinned and no longer sensed the presence of God, he cried out, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Ps. 51:12). He didn't lose his salvation; he just lost the joy of it because he had ceased to abide in the fullest sense.

Peter refers to abiding joy as "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). That's the kind of joy that Jesus had and that's the kind of joy that can belong to a Christian. A Christian's joy should be so full that it has a controlling influence on the rest of his life. Unfortunately, I don't know too many Christians who are. I meet many grouchy Christians that don't experience joy because they aren't fully abiding in Christ. A Christian who is temporarily not abiding is usually easy to identify by his negative, defeated attitude.

When you hear the blessings of abiding in Christ, I don't know how anyone could say no to Jesus Christ. Sadly, for those who do, there is an alternative to those blessings:

III. THE BURNING OF THE NON-ABIDING BRANCHES (v. 6)

A. The Casting Forth (v. 6a)

"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered."

The non-believing follower of Christ will be cast forth. He has no living connection with Jesus Christ. If he were a true believer, that wouldn't happen. In John 6:37, Jesus said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." The true disciple is never cast out, but the one who was never real to begin with is. Notice that apart from Christ, the false disciple withers. Whatever faint glimpses of life he acquired by being superficially attached to Christ disappear when he is separated from the Vine. He's like the seed that fell on stony ground and sprung up for a little while, but then dried up (Matt. 13:5-6; 20-21).

B. The Consuming Fire (v. 6b)

"Men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

That is a picture of judgment. God's instruments of judgment are none other than His holy angels.

1. Matthew 13:30, 40-42, 49-50

Jesus said, "Let [the wheat and the tares] grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn" (v. 30). We see that the "reapers" on judgment day are angels from verses 40-42 and 49-50: "As therefore, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in

the end of this age. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them who do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.... So shall it be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Christ will send His angels to cast the ungodly and unrighteous into hell for eternity. Judas-like branches will burn there forever. That's the choice that every man has.

2. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

"To you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." There is coming a day when God is going to send His angels to gather the ungodly from around the world and cast them into an eternal hell. How tragic to appear like a believer, but to end up in hell separated from Christ for eternity!

Peter gave this warning about people who have superficially attached themselves to Jesus: "If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in [the world], and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. 2:20-22). The worst thing that could ever happen would be to know about Jesus, but never commit your life to Him. Eternal retribution for such a person will be greater than for the person who didn't know Him at all. Every man has a choice: He can abide in the Vine and receive blessing, or he can be separated from the Vine and burned.

Focusing on the Facts

1. When do Christians lose the joy of their relationship with Christ?
2. Will every Christian bear fruit? Support your answer with Scripture.
3. Why is being fruitful important?
4. Is fruitfulness necessarily associated with success? Give an example.
5. As Christians, we are to reproduce the life of _____ in us as we _____ in Him.

6. Be concerned with the _____ of your relationship to Christ and the _____ will come by itself.
7. What kind of fruit does Hebrews 13:15 say we should continually offer to God?
8. What kind of fruit had Paul collected from the Gentiles to take back to Jewish believers (Rom. 15:26-28)?
9. To be an effective soul winner, what should a Christian concentrate on?
10. What two conditions allow God to respond to our prayers?
11. Does God ever answer the prayers of unbelievers? Explain.
12. Explain what it means to pray in the name of Jesus.
13. Why will a Christian who abides in Christ and is controlled by the Lord's words not pray for anything contrary to His will?
14. What is the reason that some Christians' prayers are not answered, according to James 4:3?
15. What is the primary thing Christians are on this earth to do?
16. According to 1 Peter 2:12, what can help transform unbelievers from slanderers to those who glorify God?
17. What type of joy did Jesus want His disciples to experience?
18. When David temporarily ceased abiding and therefore sinned, what did he lose (Ps. 51:12)?
19. According to John 15:6, what happens to the person who is superficially attached to Christ? Why can't that happen to a Christian? Support your answer with Scripture.
20. In the words of 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, explain the ultimate destiny of those who "obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8).
21. For whom will eternal retribution be greater?

Pondering the Principles

1. Review the various kinds of fruit on pages 4-6. Which kinds of fruit do you find presently in your life? Which are missing or need to be nourished? How would you evaluate the manner in which you are abiding in Christ? Are you communing with the Lord regularly through prayer and Bible reading? As you focus on improving your relationship with Christ, look for opportunities to apply the fruit He produces to those situations. Memorize Colossians 1:10: "Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (NASB).

2. Do you know grumpy Christians? Do you know Christians who cover themselves with a protective facade by trying to be positive all the time? Those kinds of Christians are not prepared for the trials that are guaranteed to confront us in life. They lack the greatest personal blessing of abiding in Christ: full joy. Few Christians probably experience the joy that the apostle Paul did. He understood the importance, privilege, and benefits of abiding in Christ (Phil. 3:7-14). That is why he could say in the midst of his imprisonment, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!... Be anxious for nothing I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.... I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.... My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches" (Phil. 4:4, 6, 11, 13, 19; NASB). His joy was a product of His abiding in a God who sovereignly "causes all things to work together for good" (Rom. 8:28; NASB) and who "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able [to endure]" (1 Cor. 10:13; NASB). Meditate on Hebrews 12:1-4. Are your eyes fixed on Jesus?

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