

Abiding in Christ

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[0:00] We come today to an amazing chapter in the Word of God.

How many times have you heard me say that? It is one of the favorite chapters of mine.!

I don't think they've really plumbed its depths. I'd like to. It is John chapter 15. This is that portion of Scripture that deals with the vine and the branches.

It is a lesson on abiding in Christ. Now as you all know, the Bible is filled with analogies that deal with God's relationship with His children.

He is our Father and we are His children. He is the King and we are His subjects. He is the Creator and we are the creatures.

[1:15] He is the Shepherd and we are the sheep. He is the husband and we are the bride. He is the head. We are the body. To name just a few.

But the analogy that we are the Bible is the Bible. But the analogy that we are going to study this evening depicts the believer's vital connection with Christ.

And it compares Jesus referred to as the vine with His children referred to as the branches.

And let me say to you, a branch cannot produce fruit.

If you've got an apple tree or an orange tree or a chewing gum tree or whatever, there is such a thing.

[2:15] The branch cannot produce fruit. The branch cannot produce fruit. The fruit comes from the vine into the branch.

And just as the branch depends solely upon the vine for life, so we depend solely upon Christ for our life.

I think, apart from the vine, the branch can do nothing. I got on a kick a few months ago because I got a new saw from my father-in-law after he died and he had left to me and I was sawing branches. You know, they die when they're disconnected to the tree or to the vine, they die. apart from the vine, the branch cannot bear fruit.

It cannot take in life-sustaining nutrients, and it will not remain alive. Apart from the vine, the branch is as good as dead from the moment it is cut off.

[3:30] In fact, I'll be cutting some shortly because I had a bunch break during our ice storm. The branch at first doesn't know it's dead, but nevertheless it is dead.

Abiding in Christ is vital to the believer regardless of where they are in terms of spiritual maturity. Wherever you are at, wherever I'm at, we need to be abiding branches.

The newest believer must abide in Christ and the most mature saint who may be only moments from death must be abiding in Christ.

In its most basic form, the person who refuses to abide in Christ is lost. If their life pattern is such where they don't want to be abiding branches, they're lost.

Now, a lot of them are walking around out here. I've got some in my family that think they are saved, but absent any abiding in the Lord is evidence of being lost.

[4:46] Now, we all know from our study of the Word of God that Jesus was the master storyteller.

He could really bring to life things that were spiritual by telling a story. And there are really two central messages contained in the opening verses of John chapter 15.

This portion of Scripture is a plea for false disciples to come to true saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Any concept of a non-abiding believer is an oxymoron. Those things. They don't go together.

They don't go together. It's oil and water. Second, this is also a plea for the true believer to build a deeper abiding presence with the Lord and in so doing be prepared to produce fruit that is in keeping with such a relationship.

[6:06] Now, so there's no confusion. The ultimate producer of the fruit is the Lord Jesus. But as we yield to Him, He will do it through.

His branches. His children. Jesus, in telling this story, has a cast of characters. He's already said. He says, He's the vine.

In John 15, the very first part, verse 1. He says, I'm the true vine. The Father, we will see, is the vine dresser.

And depending on what translation you have, that could also be the husbandman, the farmer. The abiding branches, in the analogy that we're studying, are the eleven true disciples, and by extension, all true disciples throughout the ages.

the non-abiding branch referred to here is Judas Iscariot. And all false disciples like Him throughout the ages.

[7:20] So this story that the Lord is telling is a challenge to all who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ to demonstrate, and that's an important word there, to demonstrate the genuineness of their faith by displaying an enduring faith, an abiding faith, if you will, in the Lord, who says in John 15, 1, I am the true vine.

Now, put those words in context. When we're in this whole section of Scripture, we started in chapter 13, we're going through 17, we have to remember all of these words were spoken mere hours before the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross.

And these represent the last of His I am statements to believers. The I am statements were all given to affirm the deity of Christ.

Go right back to Exodus, to the burning bush, the great I am. Here He is. I am the true vine. They affirm the deity of Christ.

The Lord Jesus alone is our source of life and our source of growth. Now, this is not some new image that Jesus is painting here.

[8:59] It is an ancient analogy going way back into the Old Testament text. Israel was always portrayed as God's vine.

And even to this day, the symbol for the nation of Israel was a hanging bunch of grapes. and they are actually called a bunch.

It is a bunch of grapes. But Israel was a fruitless and an unfaithful vine. God admonished the nation for its failure to bear good fruit and warned many times that such failure would bring judgment.

Israel's ultimate failure was its failure, of course, to recognize the Messiah when He came.

And they should have known. They should have known. They had the prophecies. They had Daniel. They should have known the Messiah has arrived. They failed to recognize Him when He came.

[10:13] Instead of recognizing Jesus for who He was and is, they rejected Him, proclaimed Him to be a false Messiah, and ultimately murdered Him.

Jesus is the true vine. The word true is from a Greek word meaning perfectly true as distinct from anything false or counterfeit.

Dr. Schaeffer said He is true truth. Jesus is the true vine and just as He is the true light, the true bread, the true and living water, and the true revelation of God.

There are actually a couple of portions of Scripture. I'm sure there are more, but one in the Old Testament and the other in the New Testament that depict the vineyard and the faithlessness of the people.

And the first is in Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1 to 7. Let me read this. Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning his vineyard.

[11:33] My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine.

And he built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it then he expected it to produce good grapes and it produced only worthless ones.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?

Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes, did it produce worthless ones? Now, let me tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed.

I will break down its wall and it will be trampled ground. I will lay it waste. It will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up.

[12:43] I will also charge the clowns to rain no rain on it for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts in the house of Israel. So we know who he's talking about, don't we?

And the men of Judah his delightful plant. Thus he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

By the way, that's Isaiah. That's the fifth gospel. Many call that the fifth gospel. The book of Isaiah. In the New Testament in Matthew chapter 21, beginning in verse 33, we read these words.

Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it and built a tower and rented it out to vine growers and went on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine growers to receive his produce. The vine growers took his slaves and beat one and killed another and stoned a third.

[14:07] Again, he sent another group of slaves larger than the first and they did the same thing to them. But afterward, he sent his son to them saying, they will respect my son.

We know where this is headed, don't we? But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir.

Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance. They took him, they threw him out of the vineyard. Remember Israel? Threw him out and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine growers? They said to him, he will bring those wretches to a wretched end and will rent out the vineyard to another vine grower who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.

And Jesus said to them, did you never read in the Scriptures the stone which the builders rejected? this became the chief cornerstone? This came about from the Lord and it is marvelous in our eyes.

[15:23] Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing fruit.

And I would strongly suggest that's a church. It was taken away from Israel. I can get emotional talking about that. Now, God's not through with the Jew.

Romans 9, 10, 11. But, they're blind. Israel's in the land. They're essentially agnostic.

Rejecting Christ. And He took the kingdom from them and He gave it to another people. The Gentiles. So, Jesus is the true vine.

But what about the Father? Jesus says, My Father is the vine dresser. He's the farmer. The husbandman.

[16:27] The fact that the Father is the vine dresser and Jesus the vine in no way compromises the Lord's equality with the Father.

as we've pointed out on a number of times, during the incarnation, Jesus willingly submitted, subordinate Himself to the Father.

And He did that without compromising one bit His deity in the slightest. Now, that term vine dresser signifies a farmer or a vine grower.

And that would have been very familiar as a position in Israeli culture. It's familiar in our day, isn't it? We have those guys. The vine grower was expected to do a number of things to help the vine. He planted the vine.

[17:29] He watered the vine. He fertilized the vine. He removed the branches that bore no fruit. He pruned the branches that bore fruit, enabling them to bear more fruit.

So He took the good branches, the real branches, and He pruned them. That's a... It hurts to be pruned, but on the other end you produce more fruit. And these last two points are what we are essentially covering in the remaining passages that we're going to study tonight.

Because we see here two types of branches. One is fruitless, and the other, though it's bearing fruit, needs to be pruned.

And please note how God deals with each one. This is John 15, 2-11. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Now remember, we're in the upper room, guys. The inner sanctuary. That's what we're studying.

[18:54] You're already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. By the way, Judas is gone, right? Remember that. Abide in me and I in you as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.

He goes on. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit.

For apart from me you can do nothing. How much can we do apart from Christ? Nothing. That's a revelation to a lot of denominations.

Apart from me you can do nothing. Nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch and drives up and they gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

What a denominations are trying to say, well those people are just being disciplined. They're believers. They're destroyed. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

[20 : 31] Well, why don't we each ask for a million dollars tonight? That will do it. I need more than that. because of the next words. My Father is glorified by this.

Not going to be glorified by making me a millionaire. My Father is glorified by this that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.

These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. I can't calculate how many years we can spend on those verses.

We see here two types of disciples. One is the true called the true branch who abides in Christ and we know He is abiding in Christ because He's producing true fruit.

[21 : 55] that's how we know it. The other is the false branch. That's the branch that makes a show of abiding in Christ but He cannot cling forever.

There's nothing there to keep Him connected to the vine. This branch produces no acceptable fruit and is a detriment not only to the vine but to the vine grower.

And that's Christ and the Father. Now we note here three marks of the true abiding branches. The first is that true branches bear fruit.

And some of you in here are inwardly right now saying oh Lord I'm just not bearing much fruit. I can say that many times in the last 35 years.

But don't panic. True branches bear fruit. The point that I'm making here is simple and yet at the same time profound.

[23 : 19] this one characteristic sets the true branches apart from the false branches.

So number one the true branch bears fruit. We're going to get back to that. Second the true branch abides. It is an abiding branch.

The true followers of Christ abide in him. and that word abide can also mean remains or continues. The Bible teaches that the one who continues or endures to the end will be saved.

Salvation is not the gift for endurance. Endurance is the evidence of salvation. We continue not to be saved. We continue because we are saved. and we live in an age where people want instant gratification and if they don't receive it they move on.

They go to someone else. You know you guys have been in combat there's a few of you in here. These games that they have now where you put on these goggles you've been seeing these ads on TV and you're in combat.

[24 : 43] They don't know what that is do they? My brother here is in the Marine Corps for years. I mean my combat has been in the United States but the bullets were real. And my partner when he died it was a real death from a drug dealer.

You can't depict that for the enjoyment of people. I lost my train of thought. I brought that up for a reason. You'll have to figure it out. Well people want instant gratification.

They want to have a thrill. You know the thing about those games is they all go home. They all go home. I got five friends on the Vietnam wall and I got 15 on the law enforcement wall in Washington D.C.

They all go home. Even within the church in the West and by the West I mean Europe where the lights have gone out.

I've been there. And in America and Australia, Canada, New Zealand, that's the West. Even within the church there are millions who do not abide in Christ.

[25 : 53] Usually they're just showing up on Sunday to get their ticket punched. Part of the responsibility for this must be laid at the feet of the hallmark of our generation.

We live in a time when the prevailing method of salvation is decisional regeneration. we teach people, well if you'll pray this prayer you're going to be saved. How many have prayed that prayer and walked away and they're gone? They're out here in the culture somewhere. And they're not in church, they're not in the Bible, they're not in prayer because we didn't tell them about that.

The true branches fully cooperate with their source of life, the Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledging that He is the life source and apart from Him we can do nothing except sin.

We can do that. We can do that. Now we're not talking here about sinless perfection. Wesley tried it and had to admit at the end of his life, and I think he was actually on his death bed, he never achieved it.

[27 : 06] He said, I never, I never, he said, I thought I was there, and he discovered I wasn't. Spurgeon, take it out of the Wesleyan Methodist, Spurgeon flirted with it.

He prayed to God one time, and he said, I thank you that I'm not like other men. Does that sound familiar? And he said it was in that moment, I was driven to my knees, realizing I was further from Christ than I ever had been.

And that was the great Charles Haddon Spurgeon. So we're not talking here of sinless perfection. This does not mean that those who love Christ never sin, and instead we perfectly obey. In fact, the opposite is true. We sin so frequently that we're admonished to confess all known sin. That should be done many times a day, unless you're me and then you're down to hours or minutes.

In other words, keep short accounts with God. We also learn in this portion of Scripture that the Father prunes every branch that abides in Him.

[28 : 23] The pruning of actual branches in farming hurts. It is a cutting away of that which hinders growth.

the Father prunes away from the abiding branch anything that saps the spiritual energy and hinders growth.

And the Father prunes away from the abiding branch anything that saps that spiritual energy. If we have something in our life that hinders personal purity, holiness, or righteousness, it needs to be pruned away and it hurts and it may be a process.

It is all part of the discipline process that the Father reserves for them whom He loves. Hebrews 12. It is for discipline that you endure.

God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom the Father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

[29 : 39] Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful, yet to those who have been trained by it afterwards, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

You know, I had a thought, and I don't have very many, but if you've ever been under God's discipline, that's tremendous evidence you're a believer. That's a tremendous evidence you're a believer.

Because we're talking here about people who've already been made clean by the Word of God. The Word saves, purges, prunes, and cleanses believing branches are used here.

And the Father wields a knife, doesn't He? He's got a knife to prune. He prunes His branches with the knife called the Word of God. It is a living Word and sharper than any two-edged sword.

[31 : 02] It is piercing and it judges. is now, and I'm about to close here, but we next come to two foundational truths concerning the spiritual conduct of believing branches.

I said earlier, all true believers bear good fruit. Not all bear the same amount of fruit. Not all bear the same kind of fruit. But every true believer in Christ bears fruit.

Now, I said earlier, don't panic. So, let me close with this. All of us in our life bear a lot of plastic fruit.

We've all got some plastic fruit. And that will be consumed in what my good friend Gary Turner, a young pastor, younger than me now, with the Lord.

[32 : 15] He used to talk about the great bonfire in heaven. said, you know, God's going to consume all that wood, hay, and stubble and plastic. A lot of us bear plastic fruit.

That will be consumed at the beam of the judgment seat of Christ. fruit. But if we look close enough, every believer bears some amount of fruit. And let's be honest, we might have to take a magnifying glass to find it, but it will be there if that is an abiding branch.

Additionally, good trees bear good fruit, and bad trees bear bad fruit. and everyone can be known by the fruit they bear.

And again, I say it is not the believers bearing the fruit. Because apart from Christ, we can bear nothing. If we are bearing good fruit, Christ is doing a work in you.

And at the end of the day, of course, he gets all the credit and all the praise. Because he's working through his abiding branches. So, here's the question for the hour.

[33 : 48] Specifically, what is the fruit we are to bear? What fruit should we bear? that's what we're going to discuss next time.

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