

† The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

The Communing Savior The Believer's Relationship to Christ (Part 2) John 15:1-8

1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 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. 5 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. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Let me begin with a question that I would like you to quietly consider. There is no need to give an audible answer, I just want you to personally think about this for a moment. What comes to your mind when you hear the word “Gospel”?

For anyone who has been a part of the church scene for anytime, of course the term Gospel might be immediately equated with “good news”; or the message of Jesus Christ, or even the accounting of the life of Jesus from the perspectives of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We sang about the gospel just a few minutes ago:

*“Holy God, in love, became Perfect Man to bear my blame,
On the cross He took my sin, by His death I live again.”*

This chorus is a simple presentation of the gospel, the good news. Those who embrace the gospel are those who at some point in their lives come to see themselves as sinners, as those who to some degree or another, in some fashion or another, have not lived for God; have been unable to live for God and by this have demonstrated a hatred for God. Those who embrace the gospel come to recognize themselves as being dead, dead to God, even while living a life on this earth. They come to understand that the wages of sin, the penalty of sin is to continue eternally apart from God in a continual state of torment, pain and horror. But those who embrace the gospel also come to understand that Jesus is God in the flesh, who came to this earth to endure their deserved penalty of the wrath of God. These understand that on the cross, Jesus suffered their penalty and died their death so that they might have “in Him” life – but not just any life, His life in them.

Beloved, the gospel of Jesus Christ changes people. The gospel of Jesus Christ is truly an all-or-nothing proposition. Just as we would consider it absurd if a woman announced that she was half-pregnant, or mostly pregnant, or a little bit pregnant because being pregnant is condition; it is an all-or-nothing proposition; we must not water down the gospel, believing that someone can half embrace it, or mostly embrace it, or embrace it just a little bit and yet be changed. This is absurd. The gospel changes people. To believe in the gospel is not to be half-

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changed, or mostly changed, or a little bit changed. To believe the gospel is to be made completely alive to God and dead to sin. To believe the gospel is to pass from death to life. To believe the gospel changes a person's status of once being an enemy of God, to being a fully adopted child of God. To believe the gospel makes a person a disciple, a learner of Jesus Christ; it grafts him into the One called in our text the “Vine” the very source of life, the very fountain of every resource and causes a person to not only want to, but also enabling him to live his life to the pleasure and glory of God.

The gospel changes people and nothing is more demonstrative of this “change” than what Jesus next presents to His disciples; what the Spirit presents to us in these verses. In these next verses, there is a very obvious theme or emphasis that our Lord Jesus Christ desires the disciples to understand. If you haven't already noted this yourself, please see Jesus uses the term “abide” or “abides” ten times in just five verses. To say that there is something significant about this term would be an understatement. And just as we looked last week at what Jesus wanted His disciples to know about the character of true discipleship – one who knows the character of Jesus as the vine, of the Father as the vinedresser, of false disciples as being unfruitful branches and of true disciples as being fruitful branches; in these verses we continue to see the nature of true discipleship. Jesus is answering the question, “What does a true disciple do?” [pause] What does one who has embraced the gospel do? The short answer is this – the true disciple abides in Jesus.

This morning I would like to spend some time considering this issue of what it means to abide in Jesus; to embrace this good news. From verses 4-8, we will look at three aspects of this abiding:

- I. We must obey the command to abide (15:4a)
- II. We must ponder the principle of abiding (15:4b-5a)
- III. We must understand the results of abiding (15:5b-8)

Let us now turn our attention to our text beginning in John 15:4 and consider what it means to be disciples of Jesus, embracers of the gospel.

I. We must obey the command to abide (15:4a)

Abide in Me, and I in you.

Our text begins with the only command in verses 1-11 of John 15. The command is to “abide in” Jesus. This term “abide” or “abides” is used some 112 times in the New Testament and not surprisingly, it is apostle John who uses it the most, some 40 times in his gospel and another 26 times in his three letters. The most simple definition of “abide” is “to remain, to continue in, to dwell or live in, to stay, or to endure.” Any of these words or phrases could be used as a substitute for “abide” – but does this tell us what it means? If the true disciple of Jesus Christ abides, it does us well to have a clear understanding of what this means.

The command here is in the present tense, telling us that true disciples constantly and continually abide, or remain. The idea is that of permanence as opposed to temporary. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not temporary, it isn't a phase of life. The idea of abiding cannot be applied to those who grew up in the church only later to fall away from the church. Such cannot

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lean upon their previous experiences with the church as genuine signs of salvation. The call here is to permanently, continually and eternally abide, live, dwell in Jesus Christ. The idea here is of perseverance – of always continuing on with Jesus in every realm of life. Isn't this what Jesus said, "Abide...where?...in Me". Obviously Jesus does not mean physically in His earthly body. Beloved, to remain, to continue, to live in Jesus means to dwell in His sphere, to be engulfed in His realm. To abide in Jesus then is to be concerned and consumed with what's going on in the heart and mind of Christ. To abide in Jesus' realm is to be as Jesus is, dead to sin and alive to God. To abide in Jesus is to be constantly forsaking oneself for Christ sake...giving up on those things that you want for your glory in order to give yourself to do the things Christ has called you to for His glory. To abide in Jesus is the heart's desire to exchange all that we are for all that He is. To abide in Jesus is to be faithful, to be reliable, to be dependable with all that Jesus has given you. To abide in Jesus is to be consumed with a willingness to sacrifice everything in order to "be" with Jesus. And so anything that threatens this abiding in Jesus becomes an enemy. If entertainment encroaches on your relationship to Jesus, cut it out. If sports interfere with your relationship to Jesus, cast them off. If your schedule hinders your relationship to Jesus, then do everything needful to correct it. [time to read, meditate and pray – no reason not to] To abide in Jesus implies that we would claim no privileges; that we would cling to no cherished sins, that we would treasure no earthly possessions, that we would harbor no secret indulgences. To abide in Jesus is to be changed by His good news, to know that your sinful life has been crucified and the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God.

Judas was the opposite of all these things. As time passed, his heart did cling to cherished sins. He did treasure earthly possessions and he did harbor secret indulgences. Judas did not remain connected to Jesus and here then we see Jesus instructing and exhorting the disciples in effect saying, "Beware of becoming disconnected from Me...always be connected to Me...abide in Me."

But how can you know if you are so abiding in Jesus? It is one thing to say all this. It is one thing to know these things, but it can be quite another to experience them. Let me give you some practical considerations.

To abide in Jesus means to sense your continual need of Him. Do you "need" Jesus? Do you need Jesus more than that feeling you get when you say, "I need to eat something"? For the believer, Jesus is the true bread and the true drink according to John 6. Do you need Jesus more than earthy possession and positions? In Matthew 13 we have the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. In each of these parables the men who purchased their respective treasures regarded life without their treasure as incomplete. They sold everything they had to get the treasure. The spiritual principle is this...do you see that everything you have and everything you are is meaningless and incomplete without the treasure of Christ in your life? The true disciple of Jesus Christ wants to rid himself of all that he is and all that he has in exchange for all that Christ is.

To abide in Jesus is to be thrilled by Christ. As a young man may find himself enthralled by the beauty of a young woman, to abide in Jesus is be even more enthralled by the beauty of Christ. To remain in Jesus is to have your affections continually grow in and toward the person of Jesus. To dwell in the sphere or realm of Christ is to be overwhelmed by the glories of Christ. Oh that we would come to know and experience this true abiding in Christ. It is a command. It is

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to be our pursuit. While abiding in Jesus must be initiated by the Spirit of Christ, it is nonetheless our activity, our determination. But let me make this clarification...this kind of connection to Jesus, our pursuing this abiding in Jesus is by no means the cause of our salvation. We are not saved because we see to abide in Jesus. Rather, this abiding in Jesus is the simply the proof that we are saved. Those who are saved “abide” – pursuing this eternal connection of Jesus, they desire never to be found outside, disconnected from Christ. Oh, yes, they will sin, but they immediately cry out for mercy and plead for restoration because they desire nothing that would break their connection from Christ. Oh, that we would see ourselves remaining, continuing, living and staying in Him. And notice the promise given here. Not only are we called to abide in Him, but He promises that He will so remain, so dwell, so permanently endure in us. Colossians 1:27 says it this way, “**Christ in you, the hope of glory.**” This is what it means to abide, we dwell in the sphere of Christ and Christ dwells within us.

And notice the promise in this short phrase. We are called to abide. We must obey this command and will obey this command if we are abiding in Him, but for those who pursue to be in the sphere or realm of Christ, what does Christ promise? He says, “**Abide in Me and I in you.**” Jesus promises to abide in those who are abiding in Him. For those who set their eyes on things above where Christ is seated, who long for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven, the promise is that Jesus will set His eyes on us and will be in our sphere. When we are connected to Jesus, Jesus is also connected to us. When we follow Jesus, Jesus is there, leading, guiding, influencing. O blessed thought! Beloved, the idea of our abiding in Him and He in us is pictured in a biblical marriage where a man and woman are joined together, never to be torn asunder. Beloved, we are married to Christ and as the Bridegroom, our head, we are to be continually connected, in rightly relationship, lovingly and obediently following Him. This is what it means to abide.

But all this begs a question. How can we know if we are abiding in Him and that He is abiding in us? Not only must we then obey and put into practice abiding in Him, but...

II. We must consider the principle of abiding (15:4b)

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

How can we know if we are abiding in Jesus? At the end of verse 4 we find the principle of abiding in Jesus, namely that the way we know if we are abiding, if we are living, if we are connect to Jesus is simply this – *are we bearing fruit*. Going back to His metaphor of the vine and branches, Jesus states in clear terms to His disciples the fundamentals of abiding; that being in Jesus results in fruitfulness and that apart from being in Jesus, the vine, we cannot bear fruit.

So then, the principle is short and sweet. How can you know if you are abiding in Jesus? Are you bearing the good fruit associate with being rightly connected with Jesus? Because if you are in Jesus, you will bear fruit and if you are not in Jesus you cannot bear fruit. We see this truth illustrated by the Apostle Paul in his greeting to the church at Colosse. In Colossians 1:3-6 we read:

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

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because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understand the grace of God in truth...

The apostle Paul commends the believers at Colosse for their profession of faith in Jesus, their exhibition of faith by their demonstrable love for one another, and the display of their faith by their proclamation of their hope of heaven. And then Paul says that this expression of the gospel in them had continually bore such fruit from the first time they heard it up through the time that he wrote this. In other words, the principle is clear, the gospel always results in fruit because those connected to Christ, the Vine always produce fruit.

And the converse is true, if there is no fruit in your life, defined in Colossians 1 here as faith in Jesus, love for the saints and the hope of heaven, then you are not abiding in Christ. This brings us to our final consideration then, the principle of abiding in Jesus is that there will fruit and therefore...

III. We must understand the results of abiding (15:5-8)

In these final verses of our text we see Jesus expounding upon the principle of verse 4. Jesus wants the disciples to know exactly what to expect as the results of either living by or not by the principle of verse 4. In verse 5 Jesus states this result positively. In verse 6 He states it negatively and in verses 7-8 He states it positively again. Let us note this.

Positive result #1 – Productivity (15:5)

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.

Jesus reverts back to His metaphor of the vine and the branches. He begins by making a clear distinction. He is the vine...He is life...He is the source...He is one's only hope of having a significant, meaningful and God-pleasing life. We are the branches. That is to say, we are dependent upon Him. Anyone who thinks they are something or can do something outside of Christ that pleases God has missed the principle of their need and dependence upon Christ.

But note the result and promise of being connected, of being united, of abiding in Him. Such a one “bears much fruit”. I would like you to notice something here. Jesus is not talking about some onetime show of fruit. Jesus is not speaking about occasionally fruit. Notice the progression of Jesus' thought. In John 15:2, every branch does what? It bears fruit. Again according to John 15:2, why does the Father, the Vinedresser, prune the branch? So that it will “bear more fruit.” And now here in verse 5 we read that the one who pursues this abiding in Christ will what? He will “bear much fruit”. We have gone from simply fruit, to more fruit to much fruit. That is productivity beloved. This is God's intention for you in your relationship to Jesus, even as verse 8 testifies, that you bear much fruit.

If we are abiding in Jesus, we will bear much fruit. We might ask ourselves here, “What is this fruit of which Jesus speaks?” I believe that the fruit of which Jesus speaks is the full gamut of characteristics that reveal a changed life. Such a changed life begins with the grace of repentance, that realization that we are living in a manner that displeases God and we turn from

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that sin in order to follow after God. Such an expression of fruit is not limited to the day of our conversion, but we must be practicing the fruit of repentance daily, daily turning from sin in order to pursue holiness. And holiness then becomes another manifestation of this abundant fruit as we long to see the holiness of Christ lived out in our lives. And this holiness is expressed in terms we have been studying from Galatians 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit is the manifestation of Christ in our lives as we pursue and Jesus manifests through us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Beloved, these cannot be manufactured by ourselves, they come as a result, they are the fruit of being rightly connected, of abiding in Jesus.

But I don't see any of these things, repentance, confession, the fruit of the Spirit and other such things as the end or goal. The great fruit that is born out of all these things is a knowledge and proclamation of the glory of God as revealed in the salvation of those who believe on, that is the life by, the merits of Jesus Christ. In John 17 we see this spelled out for us. In verse 3 we read this:

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Eternal life is rightly knowing God and Jesus Christ and what they have accomplished for the repentant believer. But to what end...what is the great fruit. Read with me John 17:22-23:

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they might be one, just as We are one [connected, abiding]; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

The great fruit to bear is evangelistic...it is a proclamation of the glory and greatness of God as revealed in the salvation freely offered by Jesus Christ to all who would believe. The great fruit is to live out the fruit of the Spirit before the world so that the world sees the work of God in our lives and desires to know the source of that fruit, that is by abiding in Christ. Beloved, our lives are to be abundantly productive, bearing the fruit of repentance, the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of evangelism. And if we are not rightly connected to Jesus, none of this will happen for Jesus says at the end of verse 5, “***apart from Me you can do nothing.***” Let not the branch ever think it does not need the vine.

Negative result #1 – Punishment (15:6)

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

In verse 6 Jesus explains in simple terms the negative result of not abiding in Christ, that is eternal punishment [Read text].

This stands as a warning. If there is no fruit in your life, then you are not abiding in Jesus. And if you are not abiding in Jesus, you will have no fruit and if there is no fruit then you are drying up and are will only be good for one thing, being cast into the fire and burned. This is

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a warning to those who think themselves spiritual because of what they do, because they go to church, because they appear respectable. But false disciples cannot continue forever in their ruse. Remember that fruit, not foliage is the mark of true salvation. One day the Vinedresser will cut them off and throw them away. These will prove themselves never to have been believers because there never have been any fruit. As John Calvin put it (**Calvin's Commentaries**, vol. 5, p. 96): “Not that any one of the elect is in fact ever cut off. But there are many hypocrites who apparently flourish and are green for a time, but who afterwards, when they should yield fruit, disappoint the Lord's hope.” When there is no fruitfulness, hypocrisy will eventually be exposed and such branches will be thrown away, regarded as useless.

Positive result #2 – Prayer (15:7-8)

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

According to verse 7, one of the promises of rightly and continually abiding in Jesus is having a productive prayer life where we can ask whatever we wish and know it will be done. Of course this verse has been abused, for the asking is being done only as we are what...as we are abiding, dwelling in the sphere of Christ, that is asking according to the heart and will of Christ. There is also another condition on this prayer life and that is that the “words” of Christ, that is the teachings and principles of Christ must also abide or be a part of the believer’s prayer life. Anything that is asked outside of the teachings and commands of Christ represent an attitude of not abiding in Him and such prayers will not be answered. ^[slide 08]

So then, if we abide in Christ, we are productive, we will not be punished and we will have a blessed prayer life. But the greatest blessing of abiding in Christ is ultimately what we refer to as the chief end or purpose of man, namely that man glorifies God and enjoys Him forever. And how do we glorify God and enjoy Him. We practice abiding in Jesus; we pursue living, walking with, loving more our Savior. This is the fruit that glorifies God. This is the gospel – that we can abide in Jesus because He made it possible by His death on the cross; that by dying in our place, we might live or abide in Him to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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