

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

If You Abide in Me

Scripture: John 15:1-11

Code: 1305

This morning, our attention is drawn to the 15th chapter of John. I had been asked many times the question about does John 15 teach that Christians can lose their salvation? That's the same question I was asked over and over again about Hebrews 6, so we decided to do two special messages, one which we have done in the past on Hebrews 6, and now, this one on John 15:1-11.

This is a very important passage, a very, very often taught and often quoted passage, and, I'm afraid, very often misunderstood, and what we attempt to do this morning is, just in a very general way, to look at the portion from Verses 1-11 and draw from it the proper interpretation. And may I hasten to add that I am not attempting to defend the theological position. I'm only attempting to interpret a passage of Scripture that I think has been often used to defend a position that doesn't exist.

So we're going to just attempt to look at the passage and see what it says. One other introductory comment, and then we'll dive into it, and that is this; that I wonder sometimes how people can continuously use Scripture out of context to prove their point. One of the great things that you learn when you really get into Bible study; you go to seminary or one of the things that we teach our students in our study center, Logos, here is that you can never interpret Scripture in isolation from its immediate context. You never take a Verse out of its chapter; you never take a chapter out of its immediate context in a book.

And one of the things that I think we do very often in our Bible study is isolate verses and passages from their context. When Jesus begins Chapter 15 by saying, "I am the vine, the true One, and my Father is the husband," but He is not saying that in a vacuum. He is not just blurting that out in some isolated fashion. I used to wonder sometimes what prompted Jesus to say the things that He said.

I wondered why, in the middle of a conversation, He would just pop up and say, "I am the light of the world." And then I studied the passage, and I found out that He was standing in the court of the women, and in the court of the women was a great candelabra that set a beaming light out the open court into the sky and lit all of Jerusalem during the feast of that time, and it was used to speak of the light that led the children of Israel in the wilderness, and they lit it every night of the week, and now, it was blown out, and it was sitting there, and Jesus, standing next to the candelabra, said, "I am the light of the world." Now, that makes sense, doesn't it? That puts a context around it.

Or when He said, "If you drink of the water that I shall give you, out of your bellies shall flow rivers of living water," and you wonder why did He say that? And then you realize that He was at the very juncture in a ceremony in Israel when the priest was pouring out water, and at that point, He made that statement. But when you come to John 15, and you hear Him say, "I am the true vine, and ye are the branches, my Father being the husband of the vinedresser," He is saying that in some kind of context. And it is important to understand just exactly what the context is. Let me give you a little background.

At this particular juncture, Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples. It is the night before His death, and at that point, He introduces this particular analogy. But prior to Chapter 15, some very interesting things have occurred. In Chapter 13, we find Him meeting with his disciples in the upper room, and, immediately, a contrast is painted for us.

It says that Jesus loved His own, which were in the world, to perfection in Verse 1 of Chapter 13, and after talking about the marvelous love that He had for His own, and then that beautiful act of washing their feet, it sticks in the middle of that this; Verse 2, "Supper having begun, the devil entered the heart of Judas, Escariot, Simon's son, and Jesus, knowing that the father had given all things into his hands and that he was come from God and went to God, rises from supper, laid aside his garments, took a towel, girded himself and proceeded to wash their feet.

Now, notice, it says he loved them in Verse 1. It says he washed their feet beginning in Verse 4. Why does it stick that terrible thing in there about the devil, putting it into the heart of Judas to betray him? The answer is because, from the very beginning of that evening, there existed a stark contrast between 11 disciples and 1 other disciple. And that contrast is what dominates the thinking of our Lord. In Verse 10 of Chapter 13, He talked about washing them and cleansing them, and He said, "I have washed you," at the end of Verse 10, "and you are clean, but not all," for he knew who should betray him, therefore, said, "He who are not all clean." In the mind of the Lord, the dominant thought was not his own death. That never really dominated His thoughts until he sweat great drops of blood in the garden in Chapter 17, but what dominates His thought here is this terrible reality that there is a Judas among the 12.

It isn't something He hasn't known. It is simply something that has now come to a climax, and this He repeats. Later on in Chapter 13, He even points out Judas and says, Verse 27, "What you do, do quickly." And Judas left in Verse 30, and Jesus went on talking to His disciples, but dominant in His mind is this whole terrible, fearful contrast between the 11 faithful disciples and Judas. And he knew what was going on in Judas' heart. Now, I believe that that is the context in which this passage exists, and it is out of that context that Jesus says this. "I am the vine, the true One. My Father is the vinedresser, and ye are the branches. Every branch in Me that bears not fruit, He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit, He purges that it may bring forth more fruit." You have, in Verse 2, two kinds of branches, right? The first kind bear fruit; the second kind do not.

I believe there is a contrast in our Lord's mind between Judas and the 11. And I say that the two kinds of branches are true believers and Judas branches. Those who outwardly and visibly and, for a time, attach themselves to Jesus, but there is no reality there, and soon, they are cut off, and it says, "They are gathered together and cast into the fire" in Verse 6. "The branch that doesn't bear fruit," Verse 6 says, "is withered, gathered, cast into the fire, burned."

Now, someone said that this is referring to Christians who don't bear fruit, but if you, as a Christian, do not bear fruit, you're going to get sent to hell. Well, there's a lot of problems with that. No. 1: I don't think that's remotely related to the context. No. 2: I don't think it's remotely related to the consistency of what the Bible teaches, and No. 3: It makes your salvation dependent, not upon what Christ did, but upon what you do, right? You do this, and you'll stay in; you don't and you're out. Salvation is a matter that, not of grace, but what? Works. So it not only violates context; it violates what we know to be the truth of grace in regard to salvation.

And so I believe that if you just look at the context here, removing the confusion is simple at that point. You have two things in the Lord's mind; the branches that remain and the branches that don't. The ones who abide in Him are the Judas branches that do not abide, that sever themselves and are cast forth to be burned.

Now, you'll notice both of those branches have an identity with Christ. And some people really choke on the term "every branch in me" because they think the concept of "in me" must mean salvation. Well, if you're talking about the concept of being in Christ as Paul uses it, then that's right. But if you're talking here in the simple terms of the word "in" and what the word means, it doesn't have to mean anything any more than an identification with. So let's not give it Pauline meaning when it's used here by our Lord in the Gospel. Let's not force a whole theology on the Greek preposition. Let's wait until Paul develops that theology before we force this verse into that theology.

When Paul uses the word "in Christ," he is using it in the real sense of our life being with him in union. When Christ simply says there is a branch that's in the vine that isn't a true branch because it doesn't stay there, that is simply an analogy, and let's not force that Paul systematic approach to it on this passage. There are some branches that approach Jesus Christ that plug in, in a superficial way, but aren't real branches because they don't bear fruit, and, incidentally, no true branch would ever be taken away. Jesus said that "His sheep would never be plucked out of His hand; nobody, no person, no thing could ever take them from him," John 10:28.

So true believers are not cast forth. Now, Judas is in our Lord's mind, and he is the kind of a person who has attached himself to Jesus Christ for a period of time, and incidentally, folks, this is very common. There are a lot of Judases. It would have been one thing if Jesus had only endured one Judas. He's endured millions of them. People outwardly attach to Jesus Christ, but have no inward

life, and they have all different reasons for doing it. Maybe they like the fellowship of the people, good, moral people. Maybe they want to fool themselves into thinking they're religious. Maybe they want to pacify a wife or husband or maybe they want to seem like some kind of a goody-good that they're not, and they cover up their own guilt by certain behavior that appears to them to be religious. Maybe they're afraid of God, and they want God's salvation on their terms, not his terms, and they think if they behave themselves in a religious fashion that God could never X them out, ultimately.

For whatever their reason, there are plenty and plenty of Judas branches. And what this passage is saying; our Lord is saying at this point, "Look I've had one Judas; I plead with you, be a real branch." That's basically as I see it, the context. Now, I will endeavor to support that in the text as we look at it so that you'll not just think that I'm imposing something here. There are two kinds of branches then, branches that do not bear fruit; they are taken away; they are burned, and they refer to these kind of people of, who like Judas, stand in some kind of close connection to Jesus, but they are apostates. They bail out.

And then there are branches, who, like the other 11, truly abide truly their fruit. The groups then are the professors and the possessors, the true and the false and, incidentally, isn't this typical of John's approach? When we study 1 John, what have we found that John contrasts; the true believer with what? The false. That's his whole approach. This is the way he works. So in this final night, our Lord pulls together all the characters of the upper room, himself; he is the vine, the true one, the Father, who is the vinedresser, and the 11, who are the abiding branches and the one Judas branch, the betrayer.

Now, let's look to begin within these characters, and the first point in our simple outline, and it's really a simple one, is the characters of the analogy. The first one is in Verse 1, "I am the true vine" or "I am the vine, the true one." The word "alethanas" here means the ideal, the perfect, the real, the genuine. And he says that in reference to Israel, you see, because the Jews felt they were God's vine. Now, let me show you what I mean by that.

The analogy in the Old Testament went like this. God has a root of blessing, and blessing comes through that root and extends to the extremities so that anybody who would be blessed would need to be grafted into the root of blessing, and Israel saw themselves as that blessing root. And they had a right to see themselves that way because God had called them His vine. In Isaiah, the Lord said that he planted the vine on a very fertile hill; do you remember that? He looked at His vine, and instead of His vine bringing forth good grapes, it brought forth wild grapes, and God condemned it.

God says, "Israel is an empty vine." You see, God had made Israel the stock of blessing, and anybody who would be blessed would be blessed in the tents of Shem, remember that? They would be blessed in identification with Israel, the repository of God's truth and God's law. But Israel forfeited the place of blessing by unbelief, and so the Messiah comes along and says, "Now, I am the vine, the

true one. No longer is a man blessed by being in Israel; he is blessed when he truly is in me."

You see? Well, this is a heavy thing for Israel, isn't it? This is a heavy thing for them to realize that they no longer are God's stock of blessing. Anybody now who is blessed is blessed only in Christ, right; not in Israel. To be a Jew today means nothing in terms of salvation, absolutely nothing except that hell will be even more severe if you go there because you have rejected all that Judaism taught regarding the coming of the Messiah and to whom much is given what? Much is required.

So you see, our Lord is simply saying, "I am the true vine. Israel was God's vine, but Israel is an empty vine, and now, I am the source of all blessing." Our Lord, then, is divine. He is the true vine like He is the true light in John 1, like He is the true bread in John 6; He is the only one, the perfect one, the genuine one, the real one, the ideal one. Second character we meet is the vinedresser. You may have husbandmen. This is the person that takes care of the vine. Now, I don't know anything about vines and vinedressers from experience. I only know what I read. In fact, I don't know anything about farming. I just have to be victimized by the things I read.

But from all that I can understand, a vinedresser has two responsibilities toward a vine. 1.) Cut off the branches that are dead. 2.) Prune the suckers off the branches that are bearing fruit. Now, that's primarily it apart from water and sunlight and whatever happens there. But, basically, it's a pruning process that directs the power and the light for the productive branches. You don't want a fruitless branch, a dead branch, sucking off any energy when it can't produce nor do you want sucker things shooting off of good branches and sapping the strength that could be producing the fruit. So the vinedresser, then, is in the responsibility of whacking off the branches that are fruitless and of pruning the ones that are fruit-bearing.

Now, you'll notice that this is precisely what the Father does, according to Verse 2. Every branch, "And ye that beareth not fruit, He takes away." The vinedresser; he just cuts off the branches that are fruitless. Every branch that does bear fruit; he simply prunes that, that it might bring forth, what? More fruit; make it more productive, so the Father's responsibility is the pruning and the punishing. First of all, He takes away the fruitless branch.

Now, I want to add something here just as a note, and we'll cover it a little bit further, but I want you to get it in your minds. There is no such thing as a no-fruit Christian. Okay? So any branch that doesn't bear fruit is a dead giveaway of a Judas branch. You say you mean there could not be a Christian with no fruit? That is correct. There cannot be a no-fruit Christian. So, and we'll get into this in a minute, as I said, so what the Father does is he cuts off the fruitless branch because it is false. It has made an identification, but there is no reality there; there is no life there.

He removes the so-called Christians; if you will, to use Matthew 13's analogy, the tares from among the wheat. And what happens when they're removed? Verse 6: "They're cast forth as branches,

withered, gathered, cast into the fire, burned." Secondly, the Father has a responsibility to the fruit-bearing ones. That's us Christians. What does He do to us? Well, He purges or prunes us to bring forth more fruit. You know, every Christian gets little sucker shoots all over him. You know what they are? Sins. And they sap away our energy, don't they? And instead of all of our energies and all of our efforts being the flow of God's power to fruit-bearing, we get diverted and sidetracked, and the strength is sapped and misdirected.

And so the Father is pruning us in order to bear more fruit and in order to bear much fruit. As I said, there's no such thing as a no-fruit Christian. There are a whole lot of little-fruit Christians, a whole lot of ones where the Lord goes, "Oh, a fruit?" See? Periodically. Really, Christians are defined in these terms: Little fruit, more fruit, much fruit, but not no fruit.

The third of the characters in this analogy are the branches. Every branch - and then he defines two kinds - and the Father purges the second kind with the Word, Verse 3, "You're clean to the Word, which I have spoken unto you." Drastic pruning is necessary to the branches. Some of the branches are set aside. Some of the branches are simply pruned. I want us to look at these two types of branches for just a minute. Let's look, first of all, at the ones that have no fruit.

These are the non-Christians, who - these are the thinkers; these are the professors; these are the phonies; these are the tearers, and they cannot refer to Christians. There cannot be a no-fruit Christian. Now, let me show you why. In Ephesians 2:10, it says that, "You are His workmanship and I am." All of us are the same, but "You're his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that you should walk in them." Before you are saved, God saved you, ordained you to walk in what? Good works. There can be no Christian who does not manifest good works. In Titus 2:14, it says that, "We were redeemed, and God redeemed us to make a people zealous of good works." In James, Chapter 2, "Faith without works is dead." And in 26, He says, "As the body, without the Spirit is dead, so your faith without any evidence, is not true faith. It's dead."

There is no such thing as a no-fruit Christian, so you can't say that every branch that bears no fruit He takes away refers to a Christian. A Christian cannot be a no-fruit. Listen, if the life of God is in you, there will be productivity. You may try to bottle it up and squelch it and redirect it a lot, but it's going to get through anyway. Now, let me defend myself at this point. Turn to Matthew 7. And I think when I'm done, you'll see that there really is no other way to look at it. Matthew 7:16; our Lord repeats this thing and has even John the Baptist getting in on it just so many times so that we can't miss it. He says, "Beware of false prophets." All right?

Now, this is what we're talking about, isn't it? False people, false ones, ones who claim something they don't have, claim to be Christians, claim to be teachers of the Word of God. They come in, in sheep's clothing; inside, they are just mad wolves. How are you going to tell them? How are you

going to tell a true from a false? Verse 16; "Ye shall know them by their fruits; few men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles." Even so, every good tree brings forth, what? Good fruit.

Could there be a good tree with no good fruit? No, it wouldn't be a good tree. Would every Christian have good fruit? Yes. Good fruit? Yes. That's what He's saying. You can tell a true believer because he will have good fruit. Every good tree brings forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree brings forth bad fruit. A bad tree can't bring forth bad fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. A true Christian cannot continually bear evil fruit. There must be the good fruit that comes from the life of God in him. And every tree that brings not forth good fruit is cut down, cast into the fire, wherefore by their fruits, you shall know them.

You see, true believers are known because they bear good fruit. There's no such thing as a good tree. A true believer with no fruit. The fruit is the manifestation of the reality of their goodness. Matthew 12:33; our Lord speaks again. "Either make the tree good and its fruit good or else make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt, for the tree is known by its fruit," and here again, He is blasting away at the false Christians, the false believers, and He's saying the evidence comes in the fruit.

Now, go back to Matthew 3, and let's look at John the Baptist, see what he said. He called the Pharisees and Saducees snakes. "You snakes." Verse 8, Matthew 3: "Bring forth, therefore, fruits that fit repentance. Through repentance, we'll give fruit. If your for real, let me see the fruit," he says. Don't say to yourself, "We have Abraham as our father." I'll tell you right now, God can these stones into children of Abraham. Now, "the axe is laid to the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is cut down, cast into the fire." There's the same analogy.

Now, watch. If John the Baptist used that analogy of being cut down and cast into the fire of false believers; if Jesus used it of false believers twice, then believe me, Jesus would use the same kind of an analogy regarding the same kind of thing the third time in John 15, right? So again, what you have in view there are branches that are cut off because they did not bear fruit, which gave evidence to the fact that they were not genuine. Do you see? They're false believers. They are not true believers. All Christians will have some fruit. It might be little fruit; in most cases, it is. It might be much fruit; in some cases, it is. It might be more fruit; in cases, it is that, but always fruit.

Now, don't panic about the terms in me. Every branch that abides in me, as I said; don't put Paul's theology into John 15. It hasn't developed to that point. You can be connected with Jesus Christ and not saved. Do you realize that if people were called disciples of Jesus, according to John 6:66, that many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. They were identified with Christ, but they weren't for real. In John 8, they believed on His name, and they said, "All right, if you believe in My name, you'll continue with Me," and they didn't. They left.

In 2 Corinthians 13, Paul warns us, and he says, "You better examine yourself to see whether you're really in the fellowship or not," because there are so many people who think they are. So you have here some professing people in John 15. And they are similar to the ones in Hebrews 6, in the sense that they are on the edge, but they never made that genuine commitment, and they're in tremendous danger of being cut off, cast into the fire.

All right, second kind of branches. They're the fruit-bearing ones. That's the true believer. Now, you just may have a little bit of fruit; that might not be the case, and if you're a little fruit, get ready, because the Father's going to prune. And even if you're a more fruit, you might get pruned, just trust God that you're a much fruit. The word "purge;" you'll notice at the end of Verse 15; he prunes it, Kathairo, to make clean catharsis. He cleanses by pruning. This is a word used in agriculture in the Greek language to speak of pruning off shoots and leaves and little sucker branches, and in the case of spiritual branches, the Father is concerned with the removal of whatever things hinder the believer from full productivity, from full fruit-bearing.

And pruning usually hurts. When you talk about pruning, you're talking, in a sense, I think, about suffering. You know, some of you might think I've been through a little pruning, and that's probably true, and that's good, and I praise God that out of it will become more fruit and maybe much fruit, but usually, we would associate pruning with sickness, and I think rightly so with hardship, with a loss of material goods, with some slander or persecution or the loss of loved ones or some kind of personal grief or agony or discouragement or war or, I don't know, whatever, but usually, God brings trials and troubles into our lives that have a way of uncovering the problem, unbearing the problem so that He can work on it.

Now, watch this now. "The actual pruning, the actual operation is done by the Word of God," Verse 3. Right? You're clean through the Word. But the trouble has a way of sort of opening and exposing it, and to give you the analogy that I'm most up on with my foot. I had a problem in my foot, and it needed to be corrected, and what had to happen was somebody had to open it up and reveal the problem, and then they could take care of the problem. In a sense, the knife which opened the skin and revealed the problem was like the trouble that you have, but the needle that goes in and sews up the wound inside and makes it whole again is like the Word of God.

You see, trials themselves do not improve you. They simply tear you open, and then the application of the Word of God does the healing, so if you have a lot of trouble and you never get to the Word, you're just going to keep having a lot of trouble. It's the Word of God that does the healing. It's the Word of God that does the pruning. It's the Word of God that makes the fruit-bearing increase, but it may be trouble that opens the wound, you see? Trouble has a way of running you to the wall. It has a way of exposing your weakness. You're about as crummy as you get when you're really hurting, right? Trouble has a way of running you to your extremity, and it's at that point when the wounds of your extremities and your weaknesses are open; that these sutures of the Word of God can put you

together again. Now, the Father does it that way.

So trial and suffering put the pressure on us, and the Word of God comes in and stimulates the growth. It's the Word that makes us grow, so you see the characters then, and God punishes some and cuts them off and throws them away because they're Judas branches, but others, he just prunes, and whenever you're getting pruned, and that's what I've been thinking of in this regards; whenever you're getting pruned, you know what the purpose of it is? That you might bring forth what? I'm for that; are you for that? Hallelujah; I'd break my leg every month if I could know that God's going to give me more fruit. I didn't mean that, Lord. That was theological. No, I did mean it.

If I knew in my life, as Jerry said, "Life is a vapor," and I just want it to count; that's all, but if I knew in my life that more fruit would come out of my life for God's glory through pain, then I want that pain. That's all I want is more fruit and much fruit. So we meet the characters in the analogy; Point 2; it's simple. Let's look at the concept of abiding.

Now, we got to get into this concept to understand the passage. What is really involved in abiding? When you say you the branch that abides, what are you saying here? Well, it's a fantastic concept. The Bible uses all kinds of analogies to speak of our relationships to Christ, and some of them, I like better than others. I love them all because they all express a certain truth, but some of them just seem to have much more of an intimacy.

For example, the Bible uses the concept of a kingdom. We are the subjects of a kingdom, and Christ is the king, right? And that's kind of neat because I like to think that the responsibility for order in the kingdom is His and that He'll care for His subjects and so forth and so on. That's kind of good. But I don't get any real close feeling when I think of a king and his subjects, do you? I mean, I'll usually thing of somebody way up there on the throne and sort of the peons down here, you know, really just kind of exist in subjection, and that isn't really an intimate concept. It gets a little bit more intimate when you go, say, to Ephesians 2 and you realize that the church is called a family, the household of God; God is the Father, and we are His children, and that's kind of intimate, isn't it?

But it's still not totally intimate; I mean, you could be all different individuals in the family. There's no real life connection, other than what you'd say a child inherits the Father, and that fits, and I can see the connection there, but when you start getting into the concept of a vine, then you're talking about intimacy because you've got branches plugged into something else, and there's an organic life flow, do you see? I'm not just a subject in a kingdom, and I'm not just an individual in a family. I'm a branch connected for my life into the vine.

Now, it even goes further than that when you get into the concept of the church as the Body of Christ. You've got Christ as the head, and I'm one of the members, and then His life is flowing through me too. But this is similar to that one, and I think ranked second to it in terms of intimacy as an analogy.

Do you realize, as a Christian . . . this is fantastic . . . that you're a branch plugged into the vine? That the very life of Christ is your life; that when there's fruit hanging out on the end of you, it's because the very life of Christ and the power of Christ has been surging through you. That's fabulous. It's not that He's up there doling out little power deals, and you say, "Here's 42 little things for You and 13 little powers for You; go out and zap around with them." It's the very fact that you're plugged into Him, and the very flow of His energy comes through you, and He actually bears fruit at the point of your life. It's a fabulous concept.

You grow together with Him; you get all your strength from Him; you're filled with His life, His energy. He produces fruit through you. What a fabulous concept.

Now, this is the analogy our Lord chooses. He says, "I want you to be real branches. I want you to be branches through whom I can bear fruit. I don't want you to be fruitless ones, where there's no reality and there's no life, superficially connected." He says, "Abide in me," Verse 4; look at it. "And I in you."

Well, what does He mean by that? He's saying, "I want real disciples. I want true believers. I want branches that abide. I don't want branches that are there for a while and gone; I don't want superficial non-fruit-bearing, non-abiding branches. I want branches that abide. I want real believers."

You know, we say, "Well, what about the person that hands around Christianity, and then bails out?" All you have to do is read 1 John 2:19. "They went out from us because they were not of us." If they had been of us, they would've remained with us, but they went out because it might be made manifest that they were not of us. When somebody leaves, they aren't real. Jesus said, "If you continue in My Word, then you're my real disciple," John 8:31. He says, "I want real ones, ones that abide, ones that stay there, ones through whom My life really flows, and fruit is born through the end of it." Be real. That's the basic meaning of abiding. Genuines; the false always leaves sooner or later. We'll all get a similar warning to that. So does the writer of Hebrew. Hebrew says over and over again, "Your salvation is made real if you continue steadfast to the end."

It's not that you have to keep saved; it's that if you're truly saved, you'll stay there. And so He says, "If you're really for real; if you're really abiding in Me, a genuine fruit-bearing branch; then I am abiding in you as well." Fantastic. Christ resides only in true believers. Does he abide in the ones that don't abide? No. A branch that does not abide is not a Christian. Christ does not abide in Him. He abides only in the abiding branches, the ones that stay in them; he stays.

Now, let me show you some other ways that He uses this, Verse 8. "And this is my Father glorified or honored; that you bear much fruit." I mean, any guy who is tending a vine would be honored when he had a good vine, a good fruit-bearing vine. "The Father so is glorified when you bear much fruit, so should he be My disciple." Now, what's He saying? True disciples not only abide; they bear much

fruit. They bear fruit. You can't bear fruit unless you're an abiding branch, so true disciples bear fruit.

Let me take you a step further, Verse 9. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved You. Continue You in my love." Here's another way of saying the very same thing. True believers abide; true believers; therefore, bear fruit; true believers continue in love toward Christ. Their love doesn't run out. They don't turn their back on Him and walk away sometime. You say, "Well, what about the person who does that?" They never were real. Isn't that what He's saying? They were Judas branches. If He says abide; if He says remain; if He says bear fruit or if He says continue in My love, He's saying the very same thing. Be real.

Verse 10: "If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love." Here is another way, friends, of saying the very same thing. A true Christian abides; a true Christian bears fruit; a true Christian continues in love, and a true Christian obeys. Boy, doesn't that sound like John? That sounds exactly like 1 John. And Christ says, "Let Me be the example in the way that I abided in the Father, in the way that I continued in His love, in the way that I obeyed His will in submission." That's how you ought to do it. So Jesus pleads for them to be real. He's saying, in effect, "I don't want any more Judases. I don't want any more hypocrites; I don't want any more tears. I don't want any people who are fakes; I want people who really abide, really bear fruit, continue in My love and obey My commandments."

These are true Christians. That's what I want; no Judas branches. You say, "But, John, don't you think there's something that could be said here for Christians because we don't always abide every moment of every day; we don't always rest in Christ. Sometimes, we get out there on our own, don't we, and try to do it ourselves? Here I go, Lord; watch me?" Don't we sometimes try to bear our own fruit? Sure, we do. You know how much a branch can bear on its own? Not a lot. Nothing.

Verse 4: "Abide in me and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself. Except a divide in the vine, you can't either, and except you abide in Me." You know, if you want to see how good a branch is, just cut one off from a tree and see what it'll do. Won't do anything; nothing at all. And you, as a Christian, there are times in your life, even though the norm of your life is to abide and myself, and there are times when we get away from abiding in Him, and I mean resting in Him and just waiting on his power, and we start cranking on our own, doing our own thing, doing our own will. If you want a synonym for abiding in Christ, just put it this way. Being obedient to His will; that's all; continuing in His love, obeying in His will; that's what it says. That's the same as abiding, but there are times we don't always continue in His love, and we tinker with the world, right?

We flirt with the things of the world. There are times when we don't always obey. We get disobedient and self-absorbed, and we do the things that we want to do, so yes, there are times when a Christian does not abide in the full sense, but those are the exceptions, not the rules. The New Testament reminds us; look, you abide; that's your character, so be faithful to that character. Your character is to

love Him, so love Him. Your character is to obey Him, so obey Him; be what you are, right? Jesus is saying, "Be real; be real."

I'll tell you, Christian, it's easy sometimes for us, I think, to drift from that and think we can do it on our own, but you can't. You try to bear fruit on your own, and you can't get anything. You've got to stay connected to Him. In fact, you know, I thought of this; the best branch and the worst branch aren't any different. You say, "Well, I can't do what he can do because he's got so much more than I've got." Wait, wait, wait, wait. You're both branches, right? Is the power yours? No. Is the power God's? Yes. Then let him do what he wants through both.

All right, let me take you a step further. The concept of abiding that we've talked about; it refers here, primarily, to being saved, but it also is an injunction to Christians to be what they are. Well, what about the blessed? Did you say, "Well, why should I abide in Christ? Why should I be real? Why should I become a Christian? Why should I plug into Jesus Christ? Or, as a Christian, why should I really abide? Why should I follow what I am and be totally committed to that?" Here's why. I'll give you some blessings of abiding. Are you ready for these?

No. 1 blessing from abiding is in Verse 5. "I am the vine; you are the branches." Keep that in your minds. "He that abides in Me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without Me, you can do a few things." Nothing. All right, then, if you're going to do anything at all, you're going to have to abide, and you will find that when you abide in Him, you will bring forth much fruit. First blessing of abiding: Fruit. Wouldn't it be terrible to live your whole life and have no fruit? You know, I wonder how people must feel at the end of their life when they die, having made no contribution to anything. But here, if you abide in the vine, there's fruit. Do you know 24 of the 27 New Testament Books refer to the idea of fruit, including all of Paul's letters. God expects Christians to be fruitful, and God wants to produce things through your life.

Now, you say, "Well, what do you mean by fruit in my life?" All right, let me give you an instant. We talked about it in reference to Galatians, but there's two kinds of fruit, okay? Attitude fruit and action fruit. Now, action . . . let me go to action fruit. Action fruit is like praise, like he was 13; I'll offer him the fruit of my lips, praise. Action fruit is like the first fruits of Achaia, winning people to Christ is producing fruit or like "fruits under good works," as Paul says; any deeds of goodness. Paul uses the idea of a love gift from the Philippians being a fruit, so a fruit could be any good thing you did, winning someone to Christ, giving money to a needy person, praising God, doing any good works; that's action fruit.

And; I mean, it's fabulous to think that my life can be fruitful; that I can be a blessing to somebody else; that I can do something good for somebody else; that I can produce something that is wonderful and blessed of God. That's exciting. That's one reason to come to Christ, to have a positive, effective life. But, on top of that, there is also attitude for fruit. Now, attitude fruit is recorded in

Galatians 5. The fruit of the spirit is, and here comes the attitudes; love, joy, peace, right? Those aren't acts; those are attitudes, aren't they? Now, why? The formula that God wants is you abide, that produces attitude fruit, and that produces action fruit. If you have action fruit without attitude fruit, that's legalism. You're out there cranking up the good works with the wrong attitudes. God rejects that. But if the Spirit of God produces right attitude fruit, right attitude fruit will produce right action fruit.

Listen, I'll tell you, could anybody want anything more than to have this promised to them? Love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control and anything else any of you would like? That does it. When somebody comes to me, "Why should I become a Christian?" Would you like love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control? "That's available?" Well, I'm just telling you this. One of the blessings of abiding is attitude fruit, and those kinds of attitudes produce action fruit. Now, I want to abide, don't you? I want to be real.

Now, let me give you a second thing, and this is fabulous. The second blessing of abiding is in Verse 7: "If you abide in Me and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." Listen, a second result of abiding is answered prayer; is that great? I mean, it would get old talking to a vault in Heaven, having no answers, no Divine resource. He says, "Abide, manateh eres, remain permanently. The mark of a Christian, and My utterances continue to be in you and whatever you ask, I'll do." Within the consistency of His will, He responds to those who abide what? A promise, friends. Isn't that fabulous? Why should you be a Christian? Because God will hear and answer your needs and your prayers. That's enough for me.

Maybe a third thing: A third blessing of abiding in Verse 8: "And this is My Father glorified; that you bear much fruit." Another reason to just want to abide is so God can be honored. One of the most super things that I realized in my life is that I can actually adore in the Doctrine of God, as Paul put it. I actually can be used to God's glory. I can actually display His attributes. Listen, if you ever see any love in me, it's the love of Christ. If you ever see any peace in me, it's the peace of Christ. If you ever see any joy in me, it's the joy of Christ. If you ever see anything in me that touches you for God; it's Him, not me.

Paul said in Romans 15:18, "I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not wrought in me." Another thing He gives; a blessing of abiding His joy, Verse 11: "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." He'll give you joy, full joy; fruit, answered prayer, displaying God's glory; full joy. These are the blessings of abiding. In case you're still not convinced, let me give you, lastly, the curse of non-abiding.

Verse 6: "If a man abide not in Me; if a man is not a Christian; if a man is a Judas branch, he is cast forth as a branch and withered, and then gather them and cast them into the fire," and that has reference to the angels. Read Matthew 13. They come and gather the useless branches at the

Judgment and cast them into hell, and they're burned.

Listen, if the positive side of having all of those things that abiding branches have; fruit, answered prayer, the honor of glorifying God and joy don't convince you, maybe the negative side will. If you're a non-abiding branch, you spend an eternity in hell. Now, you say, "Well, John, how do you know this isn't referring to Christians that get cast out?" Listen, "If any man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch." Listen, Jesus said this in John 6:37: "Him that cometh unto Me, truthfully, honestly, I will, in no wise," what? Cast out . . . no, sir; He is not in the business of casting out true believers, but those who are Judas branches. Beloved, I say to you this: You have a choice; abide or not abide. I choose to abide for two reasons; because of the blessings of abiding, because of the curse of non-abiding. Be real. That's our Lord's message in this passage. Let's pray.

"Father, we pray that if there are any in our midst whose Christianity is a mask of ungodliness, whose Christianity is not real, who are Judas branches, attached on the outward and detached on the inward; Oh, Father, I pray today that they might become true Christians before they become so hardened, before they become so indifferent, so calloused to that which they pretend to be; that they no longer can make the choice.

Father, speak to our hearts; in Christ's name, Amen."

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