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

Abiding in Christ
Scripture: John 15:1-11
Code: P18

Our relationship to Christ is unlike anything else in the human realm. It can be described only by comparing it to relationships we are familiar with. It is like a deep friendship. It is like two people in love with each other, or like the love and respect shared by a father and son.

Scripture uses a number of metaphors to describe our relationship to Christ. He is the King and we are the subjects; He is the Shepherd and we are the sheep; He is the Head and we are the body. One of the best metaphors is the one Christ Himself used in John 15:1-11, where He is the Vine and we are the branches:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 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. 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. 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. 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. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 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 made full.

The vine-and-branches concept makes an ideal metaphor, because it is filled with parallels to our relationship with Christ. A branch grows through its connection with the vine, and we grow because of our relationship with Christ. A branch is nothing apart from the vine, and we can do nothing apart from Him. A branch draws strength from the vine, and we become strong through Him.

In the metaphor of John 15, Christ is the Vine and the Father is the vinedresser. He prunes the fruit bearing branches to make them bear more fruit. He removes the fruitless branches, and they are burned. Through continual pruning, the fruitfulness of the vine is increased. The branches that abide in the vine--those who are truly in Christ--are blessed, they grow and bear fruit, and the Father lovingly tends them. It is a beautiful picture of the Christian life, and it magnifies the blessings associated with abiding in Christ: salvation, fruitfulness, answered prayer, abundant life, full joy, and

security.

Salvation

The branches that abide in the true Vine represent those who are truly saved. The others are not properly connected to the Vine. You have seen shrubs that have weeds growing in them. The weeds are intertwined with the branches of the shrubs and appear to be part of the same plant, but in reality they are attached to a different root. They are like people who have only a superficial relation to Christ.

Tragically, some people pretend to be Christians but have no real connection to Christ. They might regularly go to church or be involved in a Bible study. They might even talk about having a relationship with Jesus. But they aren't genuine branches in the Vine. Evangelical churches are filled with false branches. Some husbands come to church only because their wives want them to. Some young people come to church to be involved in a youth program, but they are not interested in knowing Christ personally. In fact, many outwardly spiritual people never go beyond mere association with Christians.

Jesus pleads with people who are superficial branches. He says in verse 4, "Abide in Me." He is saying to those who are like Judas, "Be genuine; abide in Me and show that your faith is real; bear fruit and remain on the vine." It is like saying, "You superficial branches: be saved; have a genuine relation to Christ."

Abiding in Christ is a mark of true salvation. Sometimes a person who is active in the church leaves suddenly and never goes back to church again. Or a leader in the church may become apostate. People in the church wonder what happened. The explanation is in 1 John 2:19 "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us."

If a person's relationship to Christ is genuine, he remains. First John 2:24-25 says, "As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life." Those who abide inherit eternal life.

That is not to say that you can be saved by being steadfast. The point is that if you continue in the faith, you are showing that your connection to Christ is real; if you depart, you demonstrate that it never was.

Paul made the same point in Colossians 1:22-23: "He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--if indeed

you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven."

Hebrews 3:6 likewise says, "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." By continuing in Christ we give evidence that we are really part of His household. Later, the same chapter says, "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end" (v. 14). A true believer has a living and vital relationship with Jesus Christ that cannot give way to unbelief or apostasy.

Only the person who abides in the true Vine can claim the promise of the constant presence of God. Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you." That means if we truly abide in Him, He will truly abide in us.

Many people come to church thinking that God is with them just because they sit in the pew. But being in a church doesn't mean the Lord is with you. He doesn't live inside a church; He lives in His disciples. A person who sits among true disciples might be as far from Christ as the native of a tribe that has never heard the gospel--if he does not abide in the true Vine.

Jesus says in verse 9, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love." A real disciple doesn't come to Christ, receive His love, and then leave again; he remains. That is what Jesus is saying, whether He says "abide," bear much fruit," or "abide in My love." They all mean, "Be a real believer."

A Christian can abide only by being firmly grounded in Jesus. If a branch is to abide, it cannot be even half an inch away--it must be connected. Those who are saved are those who are abiding, and those who are not abiding are not saved.

Fruitfulness

Those who truly abide will bear fruit. Jesus tells us how in verse 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." The person who abides discovers that his soul is nourished with the truths of God as he stays in a close, living, energized relationship with Jesus Christ. The natural result of that is spiritual fruit.

Sometimes we think we can bear fruit alone. We become independent because we think we are strong or clever. Or sometimes we look at fruit we have borne in the past and think we can do it alone; we forget God worked through us to produce the fruit.

A branch can bear no fruit apart from the vine. Even strong branches can't bear fruit independent of the vine. The strongest branches, cut off from the vine, become as helpless as the weakest; the most

beautiful are as helpless as the ugliest, and the best is as worthless as the worst.

Fruit-bearing is not a matter of being strong or weak, good or bad, brave or cowardly, clever or foolish, experienced or inexperienced. Whatever your gifts, accomplishments, or virtues, they cannot produce fruit if you are detached from Jesus Christ.

Christians who think they are bearing fruit apart from the Vine are only tying on artificial fruit. They run around grunting and groaning to produce fruit but accomplish nothing. Fruit is borne not by trying, but by abiding.

To bear genuine fruit, you must take your place on the Vine and get as close to Jesus as you can. Strip away all the things of the world. Put aside the sins that distract you and sap your energy. Put aside everything that robs you of a deep, personal, loving relationship with Jesus. Stay apart from sin and be in God's Word.

Having done all that, don't worry about bearing fruit. It is not your concern. The Vine will merely use you to bear fruit. Get close to Jesus Christ and His energy in you will bear fruit.

Some people find reading the Bible insipid and boring; they think sharing their faith is dull. Others find those things exciting. Invariably, the difference is that one is working on the deeds, and the other is concentrating on his relationship with Jesus Christ. Don't focus on the deeds; focus on your walk with Christ--the deed will grow naturally out of your relationship.

Fruit is a frequent metaphor in Scripture. The main word for it is used approximately a hundred times in the Old Testament and seventy times in the New Testament; it appears in twenty-four of the twenty-seven New Testament books. It is mentioned often, yet it is also often misunderstood.

Fruit is not outward success. Many think that if a ministry is big and involves a lot of people, it is fruitful. But a church or Bible study group isn't successful just because it has many people--fleshly effort can produce big numbers. Some missionaries might minister to few people but bear much fruit.

Fruit-bearing is not sensationalism. A person does not have a lot of fruit because he is enthusiastic or can make others enthusiastic about a church program. God produces real fruit in our lives when we abide.

The fruit of the Spirit is common to all of us, yet the Spirit uses each person differently. Fruit cannot be produced by simulating the genuine fruit another person has borne. It is tempting to see the fruit another person has produced and try to duplicate it. Instead of abiding, we try to produce what someone else has produced, but end up with only artificial fruit. God did not design us to produce the same kind of fruit. Our fruit is uniquely arranged, ordered, and designed.

Real fruit is, first of all, **Christlike character**. A believer who is like Christ bears fruit. That is what Paul meant in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Those were all characteristics of Christ.

Christlike character is not produced by self-effort. It grows naturally out of a relationship with Christ. We don't first try to be loving, and when we have become loving, try to be joyful, and so on. Instead, those qualities become part of our lives as we abide in Christ by staying close to Him.

Second, **thankful praise** to God is fruit. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him then, letus continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." When you praise God and thank Him for who He is and what He has done, you offer Him fruit.

Help to those in need is a third kind of fruit to God. The Philippian church gave Paul a gift; in Philippians 4:17 he told them he was glad for their sake that they had: "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account." He appreciated it not for the sake of the gift, but for the fruit in their lives.

In Romans 15:28, Paul wrote, "Therefore, when I have finished this, and I have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain." Again he referred to a gift as "fruit." In both cases, their gifts revealed their love, so Paul counted it as fruit. A gift to someone in need is fruit if it is offered from a loving heart, in the divine energy of the indwelling Christ.

Purity in conduct is another kind of spiritual fruit. Paul wanted Christians to be holy in their behavior. He wrote in Colossians 1:10, "that you may 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."

Converts are another type of fruit. Many New Testament passages show that converts are spiritual fruit. For example, in 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul called the first converts in Achaia the "first fruits of Achaia." Like other spiritual fruit, success in winning converts is not accomplished by anxiously running around and participating in lots of "evangelistic activities"--it comes by abiding in the Vine. The way to be effective in leading people to Christ is not solely by being an aggressive witness; rather it is by abiding in Christ. Concentrate on your relationship to Jesus Christ and He will give you opportunities to share your faith. There is no need to become anxious because you have not yet won a certain number of people to Christ. As you become closer to Him and more like Him, you will discover that sharing your faith is a natural outgrowth of abiding. You may not always see fruit immediately, but fruit will be borne, nevertheless.

When Jesus was traveling to Samaria, He met a woman getting water. She told the people in her town about Jesus. As the people from the town came out to meet him, He said to the disciples,

Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, "One sows, and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor. (John 4:35-38)

The disciples were reaping the results of other people's labor. Those people did not see all the result of their labor, but their efforts still bore fruit.

William Carey spent thirty-five years in India before he saw one convert. Some people think he led a fruitless life. But almost every convert in India to this day is fruit on his branch, because he translated the whole New Testament into many different Indian dialects. He was not the one to reap directly what he had sown, but his life's legacy bore much fruit.

One of the most fulfilling experiences in life is to bear fruit for God. If it isn't happening in your life, the reason is simple--you are not abiding in the Vine.

Answered Prayer

God gives an incredible promise to those who abide: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7).

Notice that there are two conditions to that promise. First, we must abide. The Greek word for "abide" is in the aorist tense; it indicates something that happened at one point in time and has permanent results. Again, it refers to salvation and indicates that the promise is only for real believers.

Of course, in His sovereign wisdom, God sometimes answers the prayers of a non-Christian; but He does not obligate Himself to do so. If He does, it is His sovereign choice and for His purpose; but He does not have to. The promise of answered prayer is reserved only for those who abide in the true Vine.

Still, many who are true branches do not always get answers to their prayers. It may be because they are not meeting Jesus' second condition, which is, "If my words abide in you."

"My words" doesn't mean only the individual words of Christ. Some people misuse red-letter Bibles because they regard the words of Jesus as more inspired or more important than the words of other writers of Scripture. But the words of Paul, Peter, John and Jude are just as important. The Lord

Jesus Christ has spoken through all of Scripture; it is all His message to us. Therefore, when He says, "If My words abide in you," He means we must have such high regard for all of Scripture that we let it abide in us, that we hide it in our hearts, and that we commit ourselves to knowing and obeying it.

To meet the first condition, a person must be a Christian. To meet the second condition, he must study all of Scripture in order to govern his life by what Christ has revealed.

The same principle is found in John 14:14, "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." Praying in His name is not merely adding "in Jesus' name" to the end of a prayer. It means praying for that which is consistent with the words and will of Christ.

The Christian who is abiding in Christ and controlled by His Word is not going to ask anything against God's will. Because he wants what God wants, he is guaranteed an answer to his prayer.

Our prayers often go unanswered because we pray selfishly. James 4:3 says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

Our prayers will be answered if we follow Paul's example in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." We must rid our minds of everything that violates God's truth and will. When we think according to the will of God, we will pray according to the will of God and our prayers will be answered.

There is so little power in the prayers of the church today because we are not fully abiding and seeking His mind. Instead of bringing our minds into obedience to Christ and asking according to His will, we ask selfishly, so our prayers go unanswered. If we cultivated an intimate love relationship with Christ, we would desire what He desires; and we would ask and receive.

The psalmist said, "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). That means that when you delight completely in the Lord, He implants the right desires in your heart. His desires become yours. What a blessing it is to know that God will answer every prayer we bring to Him!

Abundant Life

Abiding in Christ is the source of the abundant life Jesus spoke of in John 10:10. Those who abide fulfill the magnificent purpose of life, which is to give God the glory He deserves. Jesus said in verse 8, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit." When a Christian abides, God can work through him to produce much fruit. Since God produces it, He is the one glorified.

Paul recognized the source of fruit in his life. He said in Romans 15:18, "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." He did not tell people how good he was at preaching or evangelism. He recognized that everything worthwhile in his life came from God.

In Galatians 2:20 he said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." He knew God did it all.

Peter had the same idea in mind when he said in 1 Peter 2:12, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation."

So this is the logical progression: the one who abides bears fruit; God is glorified in the fruit because He is the One who deserves credit for it; the purpose of life is fulfilled because God is glorified; and thus the one who abides and glorifies God experiences abundant life.

Full Joy

One of the chief elements of the abundant life is fullness of joy, which is an outgrowth of abiding in the true Vine. Jesus says in verse 11, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."

God wants us to be consumed with joy, but few Christians are. Churches have many people who are bitter, discontent, and complaining. Some people think the Christian life is monastic deprivation and drudgery--a bitter religious pill. But God has designed it for our joy. It is when we violate God's design that we lose our joy. If we abide fully, we will have full joy.

When David sinned, he no longer sensed the presence of God. He cried out in Psalm 51:12, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." He had allowed sin to hinder the pure abiding relationship. He did not lose his salvation, but he lost the joy of his salvation.

That joy returned when he confessed his sin and accepted the consequences of it. His guilt was removed; he returned to a pure, unhindered, abiding relationship; and his joy was made full again.

The joy of abiding in the true Vine is unaffected by external circumstances, persecution, or the disappointments of life. We can experience the same joy Jesus had. And His joy flows through those who abide in Him.

Security

Abiding in the true Vine brings the deepest kind of security. Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Those who are in Him cannot be removed, they cannot be cut off, and they need not fear judgment. There is no suggestion here that those who now abide might later cease to do so. Their position is secure.

On the other hand, those who do not abide will be judged. Jesus says in verse 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." He is referring to the Judas-branches, the false disciples. Since they have no living connection to Jesus Christ, they are cast out.

The true believer could never be thrown away. Jesus promises in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." If a person is cast forth, it is because he was never a real disciple.

The branches that are cast off are gathered and burned. They burn forever and ever. It is a tragic picture of God's judgment.

The parable of the wheat and tares tells us that the angels of God gather those destined for judgment. Jesus says in Matthew 13:41-42, "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

There will be a day when God sends His angels to gather from around the world the Judas-branches who have no connection to Christ. He will cast them into eternal hell. It is tragic when a person appears to be a genuine branch but ends up in hell.

William Pope was a member of the MethodistChurch in England for most of his life. He made a pretense of knowing Christ and served in many capacities. His wife died a genuine believer.

Soon, however, he began to drift from Christ. He had companions who believed in the redemption of demons. He began going with them to the public house of prostitution. In time, he became a drunkard.

He admired Thomas Paine and would assemble with his friends on Sundays when they would confirm each other in their infidelity. They amused themselves by throwing the Bible on the floor and kicking it around.

Finally, he contracted tuberculosis. Someone visited him and told him of the great Redeemer. He said Pope could be saved from the punishment of his sins.

But Pope replied, "I have no contrition; I cannot repent. God will damn me! I know the day of grace is lost. God has said to such as me, 'I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.' I have denied Him; my heart is hardened."

Then he cried, "Oh, the hell, the pain I feel! I have chosen my way. I have done the horrible damnable deed; I have crucified the Son of God afresh; I have counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing! Oh that wicked and horrible thing of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, which I know that I have committed; I want nothing but hell! Come, oh devil and take me!"

Pope spent most of his life in the church, but his end was infinitely worse than his beginning. Every man has the same choice. You can abide in the Vine and receive all of God's blessings, or you can be burned.

It doesn't seem like a difficult choice, does it? Yet millions of people resist God's gift of salvation, preferring the superficial relationship of the false branch. Perhaps you know people like that--or perhaps you are like that yourself. If so, Jesus' plea to you is a loving invitation: "Abide in me, and I in you."

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