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

Abiding in the Vine, Part 1
Scripture: John 15:4, 8-10
Code: 1552

Let's bow together in prayer and ask God to bless as we enter the Word.

Father, we thank You this morning for the Word of God. We rejoice because we are not left without a chart and a compass to map the pattern of our life, but that You've given us Your precious divine truth. O Father, as we come this morning to this blessed fifteenth chapter of John, we ask that You would give us wisdom. We ask that You would give us concentration, that You would blot out of our minds the things that would distract us. Father, these are great concepts, great truths and practical. And, Lord God, we just need Satan to be rebuked and put aside so that we can concentrate on what You have to say to us this morning.

Father, we do not want a human voice, but we want a divine voice to ring in our hearts and minds and to nail down these truths that they may be life changing to the glory of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Turn in your Bibles to the fifteenth chapter of John and we're going to just look this morning very briefly at the first part of one message. We won't get anywhere near through this particular message but we'll go as far as the Spirit of God permits. John chapter 15, last Sunday we considered verses 1, 2 and 3 and this morning we will begin a message that will run from verse 4 through 11 and we'll only probably consider verse 4...or maybe even the first three words of verse 4.

The question that comes to my mind as we approach this particular important passage is the question that has perhaps plagued more Christians than any other question and that is the question: what is really involved in a living vital relationship with Jesus Christ? And I'm sure it has not only been a question that Christians have asked in moments of sinfulness or in those times when you become discouraged and aren't too sure what really is your connection to Christ. But it is also a very common question on the lips of the unbeliever, what is all this about a relationship to Jesus Christ? What is that relationship all about? How can we describe the union that a believer experiences between himself and Christ?

We talk about knowing Christ. We talk about being in Christ. We talk about walking with Christ, about loving Him and He loving us. We talk about this union all the time, how best can we explain it? What does it really involve? What is it really? We could say it's like two people in love, experiencing each other. Or we could say it's like a father and a son relationship where there's give and take and love

and respect. Or we could say it's like two friends with a deep, deep friendship. Or we could say perhaps it's like two brothers who share things and who defend each other. We could say many, many more things by way of analogy. But I believe Jesus has chosen for us what has to be the most graphic analogy showing us our relationship to Jesus Christ and His to us and the analogy that He uses which is undoubtedly the best is that of a vine and branches. There are so many truths in the analogy of a vine and a branch that can be brought into the context of the Christian life that it has to stand as the greatest analogy.

We talk about the fact that we grow together with Christ, which is perfectly illustrated by a vine and a branch. We talk about the fact that we are nothing in ourselves but gather all of our strength from Him, which is again perfectly illustrated in the vine and the branch. We talk about the fact that as believers our lives are filled with His energy, His power, His resources and again perfectly illustrated by a vine and a branch. A branch has no energy of its own, only that which is sent into it by the energy in the vine. We talk about the fact that we of ourselves can't produce fruit, but it must come from His power through us. Exactly illustrated again in a vine and a branch.

And so, Jesus here in portraying to us the relationship of a believer to himself uses the analogy of a vine and a branch. He also reflects on that one who is apparently a branch who is apparently in Christ but who in fact is not legitimate and thus is cut off, thrown away and burned in the fire. And last week, you'll remember, we saw that there were two types of branches. We met the vine, verse 1, Jesus Christ. We met the vine dresser, the one who cares for the vine and the branches, the Father God. Then we met the two kinds of branches in verse 2, those that do not bear fruit which the Father takes away. And remember, we told you those are nonbelievers. Those are people who are apparently in Christ. Those are Judas branches. They hang around a while, they gave all of the basic outward signs of belonging but the fact is they aren't for real. And sooner or later that is determined. It's obvious because they don't bear fruit that they can't be Christians.

Now some people have said, as I told you last week, just review for a moment, that these are Christians who lose their salvation. They aren't Christians. They never have been Christians. And the reason is because they never bear fruit. Jesus said every good branch, every good tree bringeth forth good...what?...fruit. Jesus said by their fruit you shall know them. If somebody doesn't have fruit, then somebody's not a good tree or a branch. There is no such thing as a believer who doesn't have fruit. Now we went into all of that last week.

So, we have thenfirst of allthe wouldbe superficial Judas branch, superficially attached to Jesus, finally cut off and cast into the fire. Then we have the other branch in verse 2, the branch that bears fruit and the Father simply purges that. That is He brings things into our lives to clip off sin, clip off the succor roots that drain away the energy of our Christian experience. He tends us as a vine dresser tends the branches.

Now in our study for today, Jesus continues this analogy. And He does so by making a heartstirring plea in verse 3. Notice the first three words...pardon me, verse 4. Verse 3 we saw last week, was the tool of cleansing, the Word. Verse 4, first three words, "Abide in Me." Now this is the plea of Jesus. He is looking at branches and in His mind He sees these superficially attached branches, that is people who attach themselves to Jesus Christ. Maybe they go to church, maybe they even claim to be devout in more than just going to church, they may show up at Bible study once in a while. They talk about their relationship to Jesus but they aren't for real. And Jesus is basically saying to them, "Abide in Me." In other words, be a for real branch. He is basically speaking to that fruitless branch, that branch that really isn't for real and saying, "By all means, abide in Me." In other words, be for real. And I told you last week that the first way you can tell a true branch is a true branch bears fruit.

I'll tell you a second way you can tell a true branch in this verse, a true branch abides in Christ. What do I mean? The word "abide" means to remain or to stay. A true branch stays in Christ. And we're going to talk about that as we examine carefully this verse. Jesus then, and I'm giving a kind of a little summary at the beginning because it's going to be difficult to understand some of the things I'm going to say, I hope you'll get it but it may be difficult...Jesus then is pleading with those superficial branches to be for real branches. He is saying, "Branches, don't be just apparently in Me, but abide, show the legitimacy and the absoluteness of your faith by remaining in Me." Not that you have to remain to stay saved, but that if you are, you will. And He's saying be for real so that you remain. Abide in Me.

He gave a solemn warning, you remember, in verse 6 to the branch that doesn't. He says in verse 6, if a man abide not in Me. In other words, if there is an apparent attachment and all of a sudden that man ceases to be attached, he is removed, cast forth as a branch. And you'll notice that the man removes himself. There are some people who apparently are attached to Christ. Then all of a sudden they are gone and we ask ourselves the question: what happened? The answer is simple. They never were real to begin with. If they had of been real they never would have left. The false branch does not abide, it is taken and cast forth. Men gather them into the fire and they are burned. So, Jesus is giving a basic plea to that superficial branch.

Now I want us to see three basic features in verses 4 through 11 and we'll only really consider the first one this morning. I want us to see the basic meaning of "abiding." And this is going to be deep stuff, so get on your thinking cap and get ready. The basic meaning of abiding...then next week we'll see the blessings of abiding branches and the burning of non abiding branches. The basic meaning of what it is to abide, then what happens to the abiding branches and what happens to the non abiding branches.

First of all, then, the basic meaning of abiding. And we'll see this in verses 4, 8, 9 and 10. We're going to have to skip around a little bit because in this analogy we need to do that to get it together. All right,

the basic meaning of abiding. Now here we see the call of Jesus in verse 4 and He is saying to men like Judas, "Don't be like that, be for real, abide in Me, show that your faith is real." It's just another way of saying be saved, you superficial branches, be saved genuinely, honestly, real in Christ.

And it's absolutely tragic, as you must know by now, when men superficially line up with Jesus Christ but are never true Christians. There are some wives who bring their husbands to church and their husbands outwardly appear to be Christians and perhaps we don't really know but maybe in their heart they're not. Maybe the reverse is true. Maybe there are some young people who come to church because they want to be involved in a youth program and in their hearts they know they don't know Jesus Christ and they're superficially attached to Jesus but it isn't real.

And so, Jesus calls to all who have made a statement or an apparent identification and says be for real. Notice it in verse 4 and I'll read the whole verse. "Abide in Me and I in you; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me."

Now the word "abide" simply means to remain, stick around, Jesus says, be for real and give evidence that you're for real by remaining. Now it's not that remaining in Christ saves you, that would be ridiculous. That would put your whole salvation on your ability to hang in there. It's not that remaining in Christ saves you, it's that remaining in Christ is...now watch this...the evidence that you are saved. You see that? People say so many times, "Well, you know, I know Mr. Soandso, and, you know, he used to come to church all the time. Boy, he was here and in Sunday School class and he ran over there and did this and why we just thought he was something. And then all of a sudden boom, he was long gone. I mean, it was over with. And he's never been back and years have gone by and what happened to him?" I'll tell you what happened to him, he proved that he never was real because he didn't abide, do you see? He never was real to begin with. If a man really knows Jesus Christ, it is the character of that salvation experience for that man to abide in Christ. And the false will always leave sooner or later. Jesus said when the seed falls sometimes the thorns will choke what apparently looks like a legitimate conversion and that's the end of it. And it never was real to begin with.

First John chapter 2 and verse 19, listen to it. "They went out from us," do you know they had the same problem back then? John's saying they left, they...they were a part of us, apparently they belonged. "They went out from us...now watch the next statement...but they were not of us." How do you know that, John? I mean, that's pretty easy for you to say, the guy was never saved. Listen to what John says, "For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out that they might be manifest that they were not of us."

If they had been real they would have stayed. And when they went, John said, "Aha, they never were real or they wouldn't have done that." The true believer stays.

Now in the same chapter, 1 John 2, in verse 24, listen to this, "Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father and this is the promise that He hath promised us even eternal life."

In other words, in contrast to that, John says, you that are for real will remain and continue and inherit eternal life. The abiding believer is the only legitimate believer. When somebody leaves, they give evidence that they never were real to begin with. So Jesus calls to every apparent disciple to show the truth and the reality of his discipleship by remaining in Christ, not to be a Judas disciple.

And I want you to hang on to this because I'm going to expand it in a minute. You may think, "Boy, it's awful black and white, it's awful...you're either in or you're out. You haven't talked about exceptions." No, and I won't for...oh, I don't know, a long time. But I'll get there. But I want to show you the black and white distinction that Christ is making. A true believer abides. A nonbeliever sooner or later departs and that's how you can tell whether somebody's for real or not.

Now Paul gave similar warnings not to be a Judas branch. This is not just this passage, let me show you Colossians 1:21, it's the same thing right there. You can tell a true believer because he abides. Listen to it. "And you...Colossians 1:21...that were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of his flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unreprovable in His sight." Paul says you Colossians used to be sinners apart from God, Christ by His death reconciled you to God. All right, now watch this, verse 23, "He brought you to God to present you holy, unblameable, unreprovable in His sight," now watch the next word in verse 23, "if ye continue in the faith."

Now, is he saying you can stay saved if you hang on? No. He is saying the legitimacy of your salvation will be determined by your continuance in it. If you continue in the faith, grounded, settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye have heard. In other words, the evidence of salvation will be that you abide in Christ.

Let me show you another passage. The writer of Hebrews, chapter 3, listen to this one, verse 6, "But Christ as a Son over His own house...watch it...whose house are we." We are Christ's house. "If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." He's not saying hang on to your salvation and don't lose it, he's saying the evidence that you're really His house will be your continuance in Christ.

Listen to this in verse 14, same chapter. "For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." True believers start and end their life in a relationship that is living and vital to Jesus Christ. And the same thing is in Hebrews 10:38 and 39,

you can write it down and look it up yourself.

Let me give you one more verse. Chapter 4 verse 14, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...listen to this, here it comes, you ready?...let us hold fast our profession." In other words, let's hang on from the standpoint of the profession that we make. If you're making a profession, be sure that you continue. In other words, be sure that you are legitimate. Hold fast your profession. That's the evidence of salvation.

So when somebody comes along and all of a sudden they leave, I have a name on the top of my ordination certificate of a pastor of a church. He was at my ordination council, he questioned me and some of the council. Shook hands with me, greeted me, so forth and so on. His name is right at the top. He is now one of the most perverted individuals I have ever met. He is now an instructor in the most godless situation imaginable. He has forsaken totally any relationship that he ever claimed to have with Christ or with God. He has been involved sexually in so many unbelievable things that it's hard to even fathom it. And people have said to me, "What about it? What about it?" And all I can say is it's obvious that if he were for real ever he would still be for real for that is the character of salvation. It is eternal. And he went out from us because he never belonged in the beginning.

And then look at John 15, it says, "Abide in Me," and here comes a marvelous promise to the abiding branch. It says this, "And I in you." And I might add in there, "Iparenthesis(will remain) in you." Abide in Me and I'll abide in you. In other words, if you're for real, I'm for real in you. Everybody in the world can claim that promise? No. The only person that could claim the promise of the constant abiding presence of Jesus Christ is the one who is constantly abiding in Christ. Abide in Me and I'll abide in you. And the Bible talks about us in the New Testament being in Christ and Christ being in us. "Christ in you the hope of glory," Colossians 1:27.

And so, we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the true branch. He abides and Christ abides in him. When by real faith we are truly saved we will always abide and Christ will always abide in us. That's not a threat to Christians. That's not saying, "Oh, Christian, watch it, watch it. If you don't hang in there Christ won't hang in there either." And you live your whole Christian life in apoplexy. That's a warning to the professing Christian that if he isn't for real, then Christ isn't there either.

Boy, you know, so many people come to church and they sit in their sanctified pew and they think that because they're here the Lord is with them. No way. Being here doesn't make the Lord with you. He doesn't even live here. He lives in the Spirit of God within the bodies of true disciples. And you may be sitting right next to a true disciples, you may be squashed in by a whole gob of them and you're not nearer to Jesus Christ than the native in a loin cloth down in the middle of New Guinea because an abiding relationship of Jesus Christ in your life comes only from real salvation, genuine faith in Christ. And that's a permanent, eternal relationship. And so the true believer abides and so does Jesus.

Now notice verse 8 because I want you to see that He repeats the same concept in different words. Here's the same idea again. Verse 8, "In this is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit." Now why is He saying that? He's saying bear much fruit in the sense that again He is saying be a for real disciple...be a for real disciple.

How do you know He's saying that? Look at the end of verse 8, "So shall ye be...what?...My disciple." In other words, My disciples bear fruit. He's looking at that fruitless branch that superficially is attached to the vine and saying, "Why don't you be a forreal one and bear fruit?" It's just another way of saying abide, it's another way of saying remain. It's another way of saying be a true believer. It's another way of saying be a real disciple because only the real disciple bears fruit. It's the only one that bears fruit is the real disciple. The unbeliever bears no fruit. The one superficially connected to Jesus bears no fruit.

He says it another way in verse 9. Listen to this, "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you." Now watch this, "Continue ye in My love." Be a forreal disciple. A forreal disciple doesn't come into the love of Christ and then leave it again. He continues. Be for real. Be for real. Abide. Remain.

So, you see, whether He says abide, bear fruit, or continue in My love, it's all the same thing. He's saying be for real.

Now watch the key in verse 10 and I'm going to expand this in a minute. "If you keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Now watch it. In verse 10, you know what He's saying? Abide...the word is simple. If you keep My commandments ye shall...what?...abide. So He says to them abide, bear fruit, continue in My love, obey My commandments. Those are all saying basically the same thing. A true disciple obeys the commandments of Jesus Christ. Did you know that? That's right. A true disciple continues in His love. A true disciple bears fruit. A true disciple abides in Christ, remains there all his life from the moment of salvation till his death. A true disciple is what Jesus wants. And His heart has been broken and shattered by Judas. And in effect He is saying no more Judas branches, be for real.

And I love it, the end of verse 10, Christ portrays Himself as the perfect example of abiding. He says, "Even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love..." You know what Jesus wants? He wants the kind of relationship with us that He has with God. In John 17, remember in His great high priestly prayer, how He prays that He may be one with us as He is one with the Father? He abides in the Father. Tremendous thought. You think He's ever going to depart from that? No. And He wants us to abide in Him in the same way.

So, basically and generally then, Christ in this passage is saying the same thing. He is still on the contrast between the true and the false disciple, the real one, the apparent one and the artificial one.

He is contrasting the one who really is abiding and the one who is temporarily connected but is going to remove himself and thus show that he never was real to begin with. And so he is pleading with that branch, that superficial branch, he's pleading with you who attach yourself to Jesus only on the superficial end and He's saying abide, bear fruit, continue in My love, keep My commandments...this will show you're real, be for real, is what He is saying.

And that's a perfect portrait of a true Christian, you know that? The true Christian remains in Jesus Christ, never leaves. A true Christian bears fruit, did you know that? A true Christian stays in His love. A true Christian, not only that, a true Christian obeys His commandments. Remember how we talked about that? A couple of weeks ago or maybe a month ago, whenever it was, I don't know, we talked about the fact that true believers obey. John 8, what did Jesus say? "If you continue in My Word, then are you My disciples alethos for real." A true disciple obeys. A true disciple continues in His love. A true disciple bears fruit. A true disciple abides.

And so, Jesus is calling to those branches who are superficial and saying be for real.

Just to show you this, look back at John 14, it comes to my mind, verse 15. John 14:15, "If you love Me...and the tense of the verb indicates it should be this way....If you love Me you will...what?..keep My commandments." Watch verse 21, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." Verse 23, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words."

You see, every true disciple loves and obeys. Those are the two keys to the Christian life...love and obedience. That's it. People say, "Oh, the Christian life is so complicated...do this, do that, sit down, stand up....wave." No. Two things...love and obey, that's all. And obedience is the thing that springs out of what? Out of love.

All right, so He's talking about the true and the false disciple. The same contrast is here again. He has been speaking in general terms, believers abide...watch it...unbelievers don't abide, that's clear cut, that's it. Now you must understand this. Jesus is saying all Christians abide. All Christians bear fruit. All Christians continue in His love. All Christians obey. If someone stops doing that, forsakes Christ, he never was saved to begin with. That's 1 John 2:19, that's exactly what we saw.

Now John couldn't draw the line any more clearly than that. But that's John's way. He does that all through his gospel. I tried to find someplace in John's gospel where he contrasts one type of believer from another and there isn't any. He just says believer/unbeliever...boom...that's it...black/white, that's it. Clear cut. John is a kind of idealist and he picked up on everything that just drew that line right down the middle. Believers do this, unbelievers do that. Believers have eternal life, they drink the eternal water, they never thirst. Unbelievers always thirst. Now sometimes, you're a believer, you get a little thirsty, right? Sure, but John doesn't deal with that. Believers don't thirst...unbelievers thirst.

Then he talked about the bread of life in chapter 6. Believers never hunger, unbelievers always hunger. You're a believer, do you ever get a little bit hungry for the Word, for spiritual truth? Sure you do. But John isn't messing with exceptions. That's it, just clear cut. John always presents the ideal pattern designed by God, never messes with the exception.

Now I want to illustrate that to you by picking up another book that John wrote, 1 John, and I'll show you how he does this over there. And a lot of people have been baffled by this verse, or this series of verses because they can't figure out how anything could be that clear cut.

Listen to what John says. And if you understand the mind of John, you get it. If you don't, it's confusing. First John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us." Now there he says one thing: believers confess, unbelievers deny their sin...contrast. And we've talked about that passage before. But it's clear cut. Believers always confess, unbelievers always deny. Now there are occasions when believers also don't confess as they should...sure, but John doesn't fool with those. Just, boom, that's it. Always the ideal.

Chapter 2 verse 3, "And by this we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments." Now watch..."He that saith, I know Himthat is you claim salvationand keepeth not His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whosoever keepeth His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected. By this know we that we are in Him." John says...watch it...unbelievers disobey, believers obey...period. Now do believer ever disobey? Sure, but John doesn't worry about the exception. He again is drawing the line clear cut.

All right chapter 2 verse 9, look at this, "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light and there is no occasion of stumbling in him." Hmmm...you mean a believer never has an occasion of stumbling? John says don't fool around with the exceptions, I'm just drawing the lines.

Verse 11, "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness," is there anybody in this world that you don't love and you're a Christian? Again you have an exception. "And walketh in darkness and knoweth not where he goeth because darkness hath blinded his eyes." See, here John says believers always love their brother, unbelievers never do. And you say, "Wait a minute, John, I know some believers who don't love their brother." Don't fool with the exceptions, I'm just drawing the line clear.

You have the same thing in chapter 3 verse 14 and 15. All through here you have it. "We know that we have passed from death unto life," verse 14, "because we love the brethren." Now watch this, "He that loveth not his brothersingularlyabides in death." Do you ever know a believer who didn't love

some other believer? Well, I know a lot of them. He says they abide in death. You say, "Well, wait a minute now..." I'm not talking about the exceptions. I'm talking about the pattern.

Now watch verse 15, "Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." Oh ho, John, that is too clear...you can't say that. You can't say that if you just hate some guy you're going to go to hell if you're a Christian. Well John doesn't want to be pushed into that. He is only drawing the black and white distinctions, the perfections.

Now you have the same thing in chapter 2 verse 15 where he says, "Love not the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," right? Tell me, Christian, real honest, some things you like a lot, don't you? In the world? Good, right? Kind of like to get your hands on them? Some of the system is umumum, see. Now is John saying you are going to go to hell because you love that car over there? You want that new car, you drive by it, see it ever time. Now wait a minute, John doesn't want to be pushed into the exceptions. He is drawing the general lines.

Now let me lay this heavy one on you, 3:6, here's one, see if you can swallow this. "Whosoever abideth in Him, sinneth not." Did you get that? You say, "Oh boy, John, I mean there you have really gone to the extremes. There's no way that I can buy that." Well, listen to this. "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him." Verse 8, "He that committeth sin is of the devil." Boy! Verse 9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin."

Now don't you get the idea that John really draws the line clear cut? John doesn't fool with the exceptions. You say, "Well, didn't he know that some of us Christians might not like some other believer? Didn't he know we might blow it and disobey? Didn't he know we might sin?"

Sure he did, but I like him because he puts the ideals where they belong, you see. He's concerned with the positional truths and the general patterns of life. It is the general pattern of a believer that he does not disobey, he loves his brother and he avoids sin. That's the general pattern and John doesn't sweat the exceptions.

You say, "Well, he must have known about them." Oh yeah. Chapter 2 verse 1 and 2 kind of gives you a little sneak into the soft side of John. "My little children, these things I write unto you that ye sin not." Now, that's John. There he is again point blank. But then he says, "But if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." You know, almost out of the side of his mouth, kind of, see. I mean, he doesn't even like to allow for exceptions. But he concedes a little bit there so that we don't lose completely on the idea that God knows we'll fail.

Now do you see what I'm trying to say to you? There are general patterns in the Word of God that distinguish a believer from an unbeliever. John draws them absolutely clear cut, but there are exceptions, aren't there? Are there times when a believer does sin? Sure. Times when a believer

hates his brother? Sure. Times when a believer doesn't obey as he ought? Sure. Times when a believer doesn't confess his sin before God as he should? Sure there are.

Now let me ask you this. Here's my point. Could there be times when a Christian also doesn't abide in the fullest sense? Sure. Of course. But what is the general pattern of his life? To abide. But, you see, John never fools with the exceptions. Now go back to John 15 and let's look at the concept of "abide in me" as we're looking at a believer who for a day, an hour, a week or whatever may have a lapse in his relationship with Christ and he may cease to abide in the fullest sense so that the passage is not totally restricted to the unbeliever but that it could talk about a believer also. And I believe it can.

Why do you know how many times in the New Testament do you read commands from the Apostle Paul from Peter, from James, from all the writers to love your brother? Well, you just said in 1 John it says if you're a believer you always love your brother. And then what's Paul doing saying love your brother? Well, he's...Paul was the minister to the exception, see. All of his epistles are full of exception. You see, he gives the first part about the position, remember. And then you read Ephesians, here's what you are, all your position then...boom, boom, boom, right down the line on what you ought to do, what you ought to be, how you ought to shape up, how you ought to live. And let's face it, friends, if there weren't any believers who blew it, the Father could put away His knife, right? Because there wouldn't be any pruning to do...no purging.

All right, so it is true that unbelievers are primarily in view. But there are exceptions in the life of a Christian when he fails to abide in the fullest sense. And the heart cry of Jesus then to the believer is to abide in all that that signifies. And I think that this is perhaps the key message the Spirit of God has for us as believers this morning.

You say, "Well, how can a Christian fail to abide?" Well, I can give you one illustration. There's hundreds of them, let me give you one. Galatians 1:6, Paul's writing to Christians, listen to what he says, "I marvel that ye are so soon...what's the next word?...removed." Oh, "Removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ, removed to another gospel."

The Galatians started believing a whole lot of lies. Paul says you're not abiding...you're not abiding. You know what their problem was? Chapter 3 verse 3, "Are you so foolish having begun in the Spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh?" You know what they were doing? They were saved in the energy of the Holy Spirit, they were living in the energy of the flesh. They were, you know, legalism, see. Must do this, must do that, boom, boom, see. Down the line, right through the rules. And Paul's saying, "Wow, how did you get removed? You stopped abiding and you've started like an independent branch going to sprout your own fruit." And it can't be done. That's one way that you can stop abiding by legalism, probably the best example of all because legalism is the opposite of abiding, as you'll see in a minute.

Oh, we have lapses. We have times when we fail to abide in the fullest sense of the word. May I say this? That doesn't mean you lose your salvation. You are sheep, John 10, right? "My sheep hear My voice and I know them." You may be a wayward sheep, but you don't turn into a goat. When you stop abiding it doesn't mean you're out of God's favor and God's love and God's Kingdom, that's positionally secure forever. But when you wander a little bit and cease to abide in the fullest sense of it, you just move away from the pure intimacy of that full relationship with Christ.

You want to know what it means to abide as a believer? Here, simple, I can't say it anymore simply. Stay close to Jesus. Did you get that? Stay close. You know, a branch is really a lot better off if it's connected to the vine. Right? You've got to be (snap) that close. You could say, "Well, this branch is doing pretty good, it's only a half an inch away." Oh, sorry, branch, you can't do a thing a half an inch away. To abide is to be totally connected to Jesus Christ in the fullest sense and as the vine sends its energy through that branch to bear fruit, so Christ can send His energy through you. You see it? To abide isn't complicated, it's so simple. It just means remain lovingly and obediently close to Jesus Christ and all of His energy will surge through you and fruit will be produced.

You say, "Well, I'd like to get close and I'd like to remain in that totally abiding concept. How do I do it?" I'll tell you, it's in verse 7, first part, "If you abide in Me...watch this...and My...what?...words abide in you."

Now what is the key to an abiding relationship to Jesus Christ? What is it? It's the Word. It's the Word. A believer who is in the Word is an abiding believer, one who feeds on the Word of God, who nourishes his soul with the truths of God, stays in a close warm living energized relationship with Jesus Christ. And so, He says abide in Me and I in you.

Now watch this in verse 4, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me." To an unbeliever that would say you'll never be for real, you'll never have fruit. To a believer that says don't try to operate independently of Me.

And, you know, some Christians are doing that. They're...they've at points in their life time, and we've all been through this, I have experienced it, we cease to really abide. And I'll get more into that. But we cease to abide and we get kind of detached. And we feel a little bit independent. And we sort of lay around and grunt and groan to produce our own fruit. And there we are...you say, "Well, I'm a very strong branch, I can do it. I'm a very clever branch, I know how to bear fruit. I'm clever." Somebody else says, "I was once tremendously...I had fruit all over me. I produced great fruit. And certainly, my, O I can produce fruit, I know the whole thing."

Listen, how much can a detached branch do toward producing fruit? Can't do anything. Even great big strong branches can't do anything. The strongest is as helpless as the weakest. The most

beautiful is as helpless as the ugliest. And the best branch is as worthless as the worst branch if its disconnected from the vine. That's the point. Watch it there in verse 4, what does it say? Right toward the end it says, "No more can ye except ye abide in Me." You can't do anything. It's not a question of whether you're strong or weak. It's not a question of whether you're good or bad, brave or cowardly, clever or foolish, experienced or inexperienced. Whatever your gifts, whatever your accomplishments, whatever your virtues, whatever your experiences may be or may have been, they are worthless in helping you produce fruit detached from Jesus Christ. I mean, what it amounts to is a whole lot of branches lying around trying to tie on artificial fruit. Can't do it.

What does the Bible say? "In my flesh dwells...what?...no good thing." And hundreds of Christians never learn that. They run around grunting and groaning trying to bear fruit. You don't bear fruit by trying, you bear it by abiding. Do you see?

You say, "Well, how do you abide?" Well, just believe that you're a branch, take the word that tells you you're a branch and believe it. Just take your position in the vine. Get as close to Jesus Christ as you can which means stripping out all of the things of the world, putting aside all sin that distracts and saps your energy, putting aside all selfeffort, all those things that rob you of a deep personal loving relationship with Jesus, get into the Word and you'll be an abiding branch, absolutely forget about fruit, don't even worry about fruit, you've got nothing to do with fruit, you abide, He'll produce the fruit through you.

People say, "Well, I've got to get at it...I haven't...boy, I haven't witnessed in, you know, a couple of days...hmph..." And, you know, they run around trying to...just like branches trying to tie on artificial fruit. Just abide, get close to Jesus Christ and you will bear fruit by His energy in you. You're a branch. Just get close to Jesus, apart from sin, in the Word. Don't ever worry about the fruit, He'll bear that in you as you abide in Him.

Paul had it, Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ...what?...liveth in me." And oh I love Philippians 2:13, that God wills to do of His good pleasure in you. Oh, that's good, isn't it? Don't ever worry about the fruit. That's not even your concern. The vine will merely use you to hang the fruit on if you abide. And so the plan is not that the Holy Spirit's going to help you bear fruit. Don't say, "Holy Spirit, help me to bear fruit." No, the Holy Spirit won't help you to bear fruit. You say, "Oh, I know, I have to help the Holy Spirit bear fruit." No, you don't have to help the Holy Spirit bear fruit either. The Holy Spirit really could do it all alone.

You say, "What do I do?" Nothing. You just abide. Isn't that good? What did Paul say to the Galatians? "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect in the flesh?" You know what they did? They started out abiding and then they got...Whew...got to get fruit, see...and it was in the flesh. You and I are to produce fruit. Not by trying but by abiding. Just make sure you live close to Jesus Christ and that will take care of the fruit bearing.

Have you ever tried to read the Bible? Pray? Witness? And when you get all done you say, "Boy, I don't know...I want to read my Bible, you know, I know I should do it, I'm going to do it!" And you read it and...oh, you know, it's just...it's boring, dull, insipid. And you say, "I'm going to witness." And you go down there and it's like ashes in your mouth and you pray and it's kind of like..."Bless the missionaries, now lay me down to sleep," and that's it. And you just...everything...you do it, you know, you go through the patterns but it means...and you can't understand why, you know...some guy comes in and says, "You know, I read the Word today and..whew! I'm so thrilled." And you say, "Ah, yeah, I read the Word today and...blah...you know, it didn't do a thing." I've had so many people say that to me. You know why? Because..because of this, you are exercising self effort. If you're really close to Jesus, work on that relationship. Don't work on the deeds, work on the life in Christ. And the deeds will all be the result of that relationship. And then the joy will be there. You be concerned with abiding.

You know who wants fruit a lot more than you do? God does. And you can't do one thing to get it. He knows it's all in His energy. Just be a branch. Just be close to Jesus. Get as close as you can by being in the Word, by loving Him, by obeying Him, get His life, His strength, His energy surging through you and there will be fruit everywhere and you won't have done anything but abide. And you want to know what the result will be? Preview of next week's sermon...verse 11, "These things have I spoken unto you that My...what?...joy might remain in you and that your joy...what?...might be full." Would you like to have full joy? Would you like to live in the midst of full joy? What do I have to do, win 84 souls to Christ a month? No, one thing, abide.

What is Jesus saying to us today? These words were spoken by our blessed Lord almost 2,000 years ago, but He says them to us today, doesn't He? May I encourage you to realize this, friends? This was Jesus Christ talking to us this morning. Oh I realize it's the human element enters into it, but the basic context here, these words in the precious Word of God are the words of Jesus. What did He say? He said this, if you're a superficial branch, don't be a Judas branch be a for real, be saved, really receive Christ, genuinely open your heart and ask Christ in. And then He says to the believer, "Believer, your general pattern is to abide. But don't let those lapses come. Abide in the fullest sense of all that it means and don't worry about the fruit. Just stay close to Me and I'll produce it in you."

And next time we're going to see the blessings of the abiding branches and the burning of the nonabiding branches. Let's bow in prayer.

This morning, Lord, we have indeed been blessed, enriched by Your Word. But, O Father, our hearts are concerned because, first of all, as Christians so many times we don't abide in all that it means. We try that selfeffort route, we get all concerned about the fruit and forget that all we have to do is just stay close to You and the fruit will all come. God, help us not to be vainly attempting things in our own energy, having begun in the Spirit we know we can't be perfected in our own flesh. So, Lord Jesus,

teach us to abide, just resting in You.

And then, Father, there are some dear people here who desperately need real salvation, who have been playing games who don't really know Jesus Christ. God, give them no peace, give them no rest. Warn them, Father, that when they have been close to Jesus, heard His truth and fall away with all the revelation available it is impossible to renew them to repentance. Warn them that Your Spirit doesn't always strive with man.

And, Father, as we close this hour this morning, may we not consider the meaning of this message to the person next to us, or to somebody we know but may this be for us from You.

While your heads are bowed for just a moment as we close in a few minutes, we do want to give an invitation here. If you've never met Jesus Christ in a real way, you know today that you're not a true branch, truly abiding, as we sing a brief hymn in a moment, if you want to meet Christ, if you want to abide and be for real, as we sing come forward right up to the front and off to your left is a little door and there's a prayer room there. And we have some counselors who want to introduce you to Christ this morning. We don't want you to be embarrassed to come. We don't want you to feel like we're trying to put pressure on you, but we want you to have the opportunity to meet Christ. And we're available. We don't know how else to talk with you, to meet you, just have you come. Do that as we sing.

And, Christian, if God's really spoken to you about totally abiding and not exercising your selfeffort but just resting in a close loving intimate obedient relationship to Christ, maybe you want to pray about it, maybe you want to talk to the Lord...you come also as the Spirit of God directs.

Father, as we close, bring those who need you and those believers, Father, who need to abide. All of us need this. Father, if there needs to be some real commitments this morning, we pray that we'll make them to You in Jesus' name. Amen.

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