

Series: Christ: The Object of It All

Main Idea: If we are going to make Christ the object of it all, we must abide in Him. Jesus gives us three important insights into abiding in John 15:1-8.

- I. Abiding in the vine is a picture.
 - A. It comes from the Old Testament.
 - B. It’s fulfilled in Christ.
 - C. Its objective is fruit, that which brings glory to the Father and joy to us.
- II. Abiding in the vine requires pruning (1-3).
 - A. Pruning is the responsibility of the Father (1).
 - B. Pruning involves radical surgery (2).
 1. The Father cuts off fruitless branches.
 2. The Father cleanses fruitful branches.
 - C. Pruning requires a relationship with Jesus (3).
 1. It’s Jesus’ word that makes us clean.
 2. It’s Jesus’ word that prepares us for fruit-bearing.
- III. Abiding in the vine involves purposeful reliance (4-8).

Working definition: To abide in Christ is to be connected to Christ and purposefully depend on Him for everything. When I am abiding in Christ, I am allowing Him to reproduce His life in and through me.

 - A. Jesus identifies the results of abiding (5-6).
 - B. Jesus identifies the responsibilities of abiding (7-8).
 1. It takes contact (7a).
 2. It takes communication (7b).
 3. It takes commitment (8).

Make It Personal: Resolve to purposefully depend on Jesus for everything.

It’s time for another verb to fuel our worship, and we’ll find it in John 15. We’re looking at verbs this summer, for God has given us verbs to show us what it looks like when *Christ is the object of it all* in our lives.

As we’ve seen previously, when He is the object of it all, we open the door to Him (Rev 3:14-22). We find our identity in Him (Galatians 2:20). We follow Him and hate family for Him (Luke 14:25-35). We know Him (Phil 3:7-11). And we *abide* in Him.

That’s today’s verb. *Abide*. As we open our Bibles to John 15, we’re coming to a vital text in God’s Word, a text I turn to often, a text where Jesus shows us plainly what it takes to glorify God (verse 8) and experience maximum joy in our lives (verse 11).

Scripture Reading: John 15:1-8

Jesus and His disciples had just eaten the Passover Meal, a highly symbolic meal. On the table before them, there had been three significant items, each revealing something special about Jesus. The lamb, the bread, and the fruit of the vine.

The lamb—John the Baptist had announced that Jesus is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). The bread—Christ had already announced, "I am the Bread of Life." (Jn 6:65) And there was the fruit. Jesus speaks in John 15:1, "I am the true vine."

This is Jesus’ eighth “*I Am*” claim recorded in John’s gospel. Previously, the Lord referred to Himself as *the Bread, the Light, and the Resurrection*, to name just three images. Now He calls Himself *the Vine*.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message at WBC in 2014 in the John series.

Why? To us, a vine isn't very pretty. In fact, it's sort of a nuisance. You have to whack it off the side of the house, and keep it from taking over the sidewalk. Obviously, that's not the type of vine Jesus had in mind.

But what *is* He saying? Notice *when* Jesus said this. John concludes the previous chapter with Jesus saying, "Come now; let us leave (14:31)." At which point Jesus and the eleven apparently left the upper room, technically finishing the *upper room discourse*.

Although scholars debate this, it seems that while the words of John 13-14 were given in the upper room, the content of chapters 15-17 was given after they left, on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. They went down the steps, through the winding streets of Jerusalem, out through the gate, down the slope, across the brook Kidron, and up the Mount of Olives. According to 18:1, they don't cross Kidron until after Jesus' prayer in chapter 17.

It's possible that as the group traveled through the darkness, Jesus saw a vineyard, a *grape* vineyard. Vines were plentiful in the agricultural nation of Israel. To develop a vineyard, a person would first clear the rocks out of the field, and use the rocks to build a protective wall to keep out thieves. Then he would terrace the ground, and possibly build a watchtower in the middle of the vineyard.

Vineyards took lots of work. The vines needed constant care. Every year, the gardener would have to chop back the excess foliage and stake up the plant to keep the fruit off the ground.

So perhaps Jesus saw such a vine, and then made this announcement. "I am the true vine." Those words tell us so much about Jesus, who He is, why He came, and what it takes to experience the kind of life God intends for us.

The Christian life is life in the vine. That's what God intends. That's the kind of life that results in the Father's glory and our joy.

And this brings us to our verb. If we are going to make Christ the object of it all, we must *abide* in Him. Meaning what? Let's listen to Jesus. He gives us three important insights into abiding in John 15:1-8.

I. Abiding in the vine is a picture.

What did this image of the vine mean to Jesus and His disciples?

A. It comes from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, who did the vine represent? Let's look at a couple of passages.

Psalms 80:8-9 "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land."

Who is the vine here? It was Israel. God brought the vine Israel out of Egypt and planted it in the Promised Land. What happened to the vine, Israel? We find the answer in a song the Lord wrote about His vine, which He gave to the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 5:1-7 "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ² He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ³ "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? ⁵ Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will

be trampled. ⁶ I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.”

This is God speaking. He is the gardener. What does a gardener expect out of his vine? A bunch of beautiful branches? No, not this kind of vine. He wants *fruit*. This is what the Lord expected out of Israel. Fruit. What kind of fruit?

Isaiah tells us in the very next verse, Isaiah 5:7. “The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”

God intended for His people to exhibit the fruit of justice and righteousness, both personally and corporately. He wanted the world to see His chosen nation, His *vine*, and learn the truth about Him. But His people did not fulfill that mission. For fourteen centuries, they failed. Israel was a disappointing, degenerate vine.

Then along came Jesus. And what did He say? He said, “I am the *true* vine.” *True*, in contrast with the disappointing, degenerate vine Israel. *I’ve come to do what God intended Israel to do*, says Jesus.

Don’t miss this, dear friends. Life in the vine is a picture that comes from the Old Testament. And as with so many other Old Testament pictures, it’s fulfilled in Christ.

B. It’s fulfilled in Christ. Israel failed. Jesus did not. Israel took God’s good law and violated it, again and again. But not only did Jesus obey God’s law, by exhibiting perfect justice and righteousness, He *fulfilled* it.

Jesus Himself said this in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

You say, “Why does that matter?” Here’s why. Listen again to Jesus, “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:20).”

If you’re banking on your law-keeping efforts to take you to heaven, you’re in for a rude awakening. “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment,” says Jesus (in Matthew 5:22). He also says, “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:28).” And, “Do not swear at all (Matt 5:34).” And if those don’t convict you, try this one. “Be perfect,” says Jesus, “as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48).”

I was angry last week. I battled lustful thoughts last week. I used God’s name in routine, empty ways last week. Which means I violated God’s law last week. Which means that even if I did some good things in *your* eyes this past week, or in *my* eyes, in God’s eyes I’m a law-breaker. Which means I must pay the penalty for my law-breaking.

And yet, praise God for His grace, someone paid it for me. Who? The One we hear speaking to us this morning who said, “I am the true vine.” Dear friends, Jesus the Christ came to do for Israel, and for you and me, what we have all failed to do. He not only kept the Law, but fulfilled it for the benefit of all who would acknowledge their guilt and put their total trust in Him.

What Jesus is saying here struck a sensitive note for Jews. He is telling them, “If you think that just because you are an Israelite you are a branch in God’s vine, you are wrong. It’s not Jewish blood that connects a person to God’s vine. It’s not righteous deeds. It’s a relationship with Me. I am the *true* vine.”

Closer to home, it's not church membership that makes us one of God's people, either. Nor a baptismal certificate. Nor a decision card. Nor the good life others say we have lived. Our only hope (and it is a certain hope) is to be connected to the true vine.

Yet there's something else about the vine-picture that we must see at the outset.

C. Its objective is fruit, that which brings glory to the Father and joy to us.

Friends, let me say it again. What God wants from His vine isn't foliage, but fruit. Jesus mentions *fruit* again and again in this teaching session. In verse 2 (NIV), "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no **fruit**, while every branch that does bear **fruit** he prunes so that it will be even more **fruitful**." In verse 4, "No branch can bear **fruit** by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear **fruit** unless you remain in me." And in verse 5, "he will bear much **fruit**."

This is what the Father desires, and this is why Jesus came. He came to live a fruitful life, yes, but also to reproduce His fruit in those connected to Him.

So what is fruit? We'll talk about this in greater detail as we walk through the text, but for now let's go to the end. I want us to see two key elements of fruit.

The first is in verse 8, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit. What is fruit? Fruit is that which brings glory (honor, weight, attention) to God the Father. This is what the True Vine came to produce, and this is what He intends to reproduce through us, His branches.

Now notice a second element in verse 11 (NIV), "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Joy. *My* joy in you, says Jesus, and *your* joy made complete. This too is the outcome of fruit. Glory to the Father, maximum joy to the person connected to Christ.

This is what life in the vine is all about. This is what God is after. This is why He sent His Son into the world who kept the law, died a law-breaker's death in behalf of His people, and then conquered death. He is after the fullest display of His glory and the fullest experience of our joy.

Is that what you're after as you live your life? When you go to school, or to the ball-field, or work? Can you say, "What I want to see flow from my life is that which brings God the most glory, for I know that will bring me the most joy"?

You say, "Yes, that's what I want! But what does it take?" Jesus is about to tell us. This *fruitful life* requires two fundamental responsibilities. One is God's, the other ours.

II. Abiding in the vine requires pruning (1-3).

I learned a lot about pruning when I was in high school. I worked for my uncles who had a wholesale nursery. There were hundreds of trees and shrubs in the thirty acre bottom land. I learned that maturity isn't an automatic for plants. The growth process takes sunshine, water, good soil, the right temperature, and something else.

Pruning. I remember how cruel it seemed at first. Uncle Phil handed me the knife, showed me the trees (the maples, the oaks, the mountain ash, the crimson king), and told me it was my job to prune them. That meant I had to cut away what's called sucker growth from around the trunk, for if those shoots remained, they would sap the nourishment the tree needed to be healthy and strong.

I learned three important lessons about pruning from that experience. *One*, pruning is the responsibility of the gardener. *Two*, pruning involves radical surgery. *Three*, the goal of pruning is fruitfulness. The Lord Jesus talked about the same three lessons.

A. Pruning is the responsibility of the Father. He says in verse 1, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser [NIV ‘gardener’; ‘husbandman’ in the KJV].” Who is the gardener? The Father. *Vinedresser* is an agricultural term which refers to one who tills the soil. It’s the person responsible for the growth of the plants.

Pruning is the responsibility of the Father who is actively involved in the lives of those who profess faith in His Son. Why? Because it is His vine, and what happens in His vine is all about His glory. What’s involved in the Father’s pruning process?

B. Pruning involves radical surgery (2). “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away [NIV ‘cuts off’], and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

I read that an Israeli vinedresser prunes his vine every year, and he does it in two ways. First, he cuts away dead wood that can breed disease and insects. And second, he cuts away living growth that is undesirable, such as excess branches and even whole bunches of grapes at times.

Why take such drastic action? Because the vinedresser is after maximum productivity. Yes, cutting and clipping and removing are drastic, decisive actions performed by the gardener. But it’s vital.

“This pruning process,” explains Warren Wiersbe, “is the most important part of the whole enterprise, and the people who do it must be carefully trained or they can destroy an entire crop. Some vineyards invest two or three years in training the ‘pruners’ so they know where to cut, how much to cut, and even what angle to cut.”²

Jesus specifies the use of two types of radical surgery in verse 2.

1. *The Father cuts off fruitless branches.* In the first part of verse 2, Jesus talks about a branch that bears no fruit. He doesn’t say that the Father “fixes” that branch, but rather “takes away” [NIV “cuts off”] that branch. In verse 6 the Lord elaborates on what happens to such branches, saying they are “gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.”

Who is Jesus talking about here? Who does the “taken away branch” represent? You say, “Well, Jesus said, ‘Every branch IN ME,’ so these branches are Christians, right? These are Christians who lost their salvation.”

No, not true Christians. A Christian cannot lose what Jesus says is eternal. “I give them eternal life and they will never perish,” said Jesus back in John 10:28. Eternal life doesn’t end. It lasts forever. Once a person receives eternal life, they never perish.

Okay, that’s clear. So how then can a person that Jesus says is *in Me* be cut off? For starters, the “in me” language in John 15 is not the same as Paul’s “in Christ” language. For instance, according to Ephesians, when a person is saved, he is placed *in Christ* (1:3).

That’s a wonderful truth, but it’s not Jesus’ point here. He’s using a metaphor, but we must be careful not to push a metaphor beyond the author’s intention.

Who are these people that Jesus says are *in Me* that the Father *takes away*? Here’s a clue. One of them just left the presence of Jesus. Who? I want to come back to that question after we ponder what Jesus says in verse 6.

For now, realize this. It’s possible to be, as was this man, connected to Christ in the John 15 sense of the word, but not *in Christ* in the 2 Corinthians 5:17 sense of the word (“If any man is *in Christ*, he is a new creation”).

² Warren Wiersbe, p. 356.

Jesus is saying, “Not every person who professes to be my follower is a true disciple. A branch that bears no fruit is dead, and in time his deadness will be shown for what it is when he is *cut off by My Father*.”³

But there’s more. Jesus refers to a second type of pruning that the Father performs.

2. *The Father cleanses fruitful branches.* Notice the second half of verse 2, “While every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” Notice what the Father does with fruitful branches. He “prunes” them (“purgeth” is the word in the KJV). The Greek verb is *kathairei*, which means “to cleanse,” here meaning “to cleanse by pruning.” The Father prunes fruit-bearing branches.

Why? Jesus says it’s so the branch will become even *more fruitful*. Let’s not miss the progression here: fruit (2a), more fruit (2b), much fruit (5). Again, the goal of the gardener isn’t foliage, or even fruit, but maximum fruit.

What does that mean for us? It means in part that our Father isn’t living in the past, nor should we. “Well, I used to serve the Lord...” Or, “I once did a Bible study with...”

Suppose an apple tree could talk, and it said to the gardener, “I gave you twenty bushels of apples five years ago. Remember how happy you were? I think that’s enough. I don’t want to produce any more. I just want to take it easy and let my branches grow.”

What would the gardener do? He’d whack off some branches! So does our Father. He prunes us. Why? So we’ll bear even more fruit, for His glory and our maximum joy.

Friends, the worst thing God could do for a believer would be to let him alone, and let him have his own way.⁴ It’s because He loves us that He prunes us.

Sometimes He cuts away dead wood from our lives. Sometimes He lops off living growth. In other words, He takes away good things so we’ll experience what’s far better.

Without question, this pruning is radical, and can be painful. But it’s always our maximum joy He’s after, and the fullest display of His glory.

Let this sink in. God is committed to doing exactly what it takes so our lives will be fruitful. He is working in us right now with this purpose in mind, pruning us.⁵

He’s intent on taking things away because He wants to give us something far better. So He snips away things like sin, for sure, but also worldly distractions that would hinder our fruit-bearing, or even good things at times.

One of our Father’s favorite pruning tools is the knife of suffering. Have you noticed how in times of suffering God opens your eyes to things that are distracting you from what really matters in life? Oh, how our Heavenly Gardener loves us!

Do we look at our trials that way? The next time we face a difficulty, instead of complaining or lapsing into fear or self-pity, let’s recognize what our Father is doing and thank Him for it. Let’s see His hand in the suffering.

³ Some translate the Greek verb *airo* as “take or lift up” rather than “cut off/remove” as I have done (i.e. Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine*, p. 33). While this interpretation is possible, I’m not convinced it does justice to the lexical data of *airo*, especially as used in John’s gospel. John 11:39, 41 “*Take away the stone.*” John 17:15 “I pray not that you *take them out* of the world.” John 19:15 (at the crucifixion) “*Away with Him!*” The normal use of the term refers to *removal*, not lifting.

⁴ As Wiersbe observes.

⁵ The Greek word *kathairo* appears only one other time in the New Testament, but it’s also found in extrabiblical Greek literature. There it refers to cleansing grain, the act of separating grain from waste material, and also of cleansing soil of weeds before planting a crop. The first century Jewish philosopher Philo said that unnecessary shoots that grow on plants are a hindrance to the good shoots which the gardener cleanses (*kathairo*) by pruning.

Charles Spurgeon did, and it gave him great hope. He explains: “If you drink of the river of affliction near its outfall,” he preached in 1868, “it is brackish and offensive to the taste, but if you will trace it to its source, where it rises at the foot of the throne of God, you will find its waters to be sweet and health-giving.” He explained in 1873: “As long as I trace my pain to accident, my bereavement to mistake, my loss to another’s wrong, my discomfort to an enemy, and so on, I am of the earth, earthy, and shall break my teeth with gravel stones; but when I rise to my God and see his hand at work, I grow calm, I have not a word of repining.”⁶

I’ve appreciated something else Spurgeon said. It’s usually right after the seasons of greatest suffering that we experience the seasons of greatest fruitfulness.

So are you experiencing the pruning hand of God right now? If so, are you cooperating with the Gardener or resisting Him? Are you trying to cling to the things He is seeking to remove from your life, maybe a bitter spirit, or a dangerous relationship, or maybe even something good that’s becoming an idol in your heart? Let’s surrender and say, “Have Thine own way.”

We learn something else about pruning in John 15.

C. Pruning requires a relationship with Jesus (3). This is what Jesus says in verse 3, “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”

You—Jesus is talking to the twelve minus Judas, the apostles, men He has chosen. These are men who know Him, who believe in Him, who have a relationship with Him.

You are already *clean*. The word ‘clean’ here and the verb ‘prunes’ in verse 2 are closely related in the Greek. Perhaps Jesus didn’t want His followers to be fearful of the Father’s pruning work, so He tells them, “What the Father does with the branches is what I’ve already been doing with you.” You are already pruned and clean. And what made you clean? Jesus says it was “the word which I have spoken to you.”

Men, during your three years with Me, My word has been pruning you and making you clean. My word has admonished you when needed. My word has cut out the undesirable traits in your lives. Now I’m leaving, and you are ready to produce fruit.

1. *It’s Jesus’ word that makes us clean.*

2. *It’s Jesus’ word that prepares us for fruit-bearing.* No wonder Jesus told these men, “Go and make disciples, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” His Word is the key to everything.

This brings us back to a fundamental question I ask regularly. What place does the Word have in your life? Do you read it daily, and place yourself under it weekly? And when you do read and hear it, do you submit to your Father’s pruning work when He confronts something in your heart or life?

As your pastor, allow me to speak frankly. D. A. Carson is right, “No one is more miserable than the Christian who hedges in obedience. He doesn’t love sin enough to enjoy its pleasures, and he doesn’t love Christ enough to relish holiness.”⁷

The Father wants our fruitfulness. That’s why He’s pruning us. That’s His commitment to us, for our maximum joy and His maximum glory.

This brings us to Jesus’ third point. Abiding is a picture, requires pruning, and...

⁶ <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ch/1991/issue29/2922.html>

⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*, p. 100.

III. Abiding in the vine involves purposeful reliance (4-8).

Look at verse 4, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

Pruning is the Father’s responsibility. And the disciple’s? It’s not complicated. Just one simple word. *Meno* in the Greek. *Remain* in the NIV. *Abide* in the AV, ESV, and NASB. If we want to experience fruit, we must abide. Why? Because we don’t have within ourselves what it takes to produce fruit. Only He does. We can’t bear fruit unless we abide in Him, says Jesus.

So what is *fruit*? It’s not complicated. Fruit is the product of and reproduction of the plant. A peach tree produces peaches. A grape vine grapes. An apple tree apples.

What do Christians produce? *I am the vine*. Christians reproduce Christ. Or I should say, Christ produces Christ in the followers of Christ. This happens in a couple of ways.

The first is *Christlikeness*. Christ reproduces Himself by forming a people that resemble Him. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23).”

But it doesn’t stop there. Christ doesn’t just reproduce Christ *in* His followers, but *through* them. “All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth (Col 1:6).” What kind of fruit is that? Evangelism. Not just Christlikeness, but more Christians.

So this is fruit. Fruit is Christ reproducing Himself in us and through us to the glory of His Father. But fruitfulness does not just happen. The Father’s part is pruning. What’s our responsibility? I’ll answer that with two words.

Purposeful reliance. That’s what I think abide means here. Here’s a working definition. *To abide in Christ is to be connected to Christ and purposefully depend on Him for everything. When I am abiding in Christ, I am allowing Him to reproduce His life in and through me.*⁸

In verses 5-8, Jesus identifies the results and the responsibilities of abiding.

A. Jesus identifies the results of abiding (5-6). Here’s the first.

1. *The person who abides in Christ will produce fruit (5)*. I didn’t make that up. That’s what our Master said. “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

The person who abides in Christ is fruitful. Jesus does not say he *might* bear fruit, but *will*. And why is that the case? Because fruitfulness, to put it simply, is the result of Christ’s life being reproduced in and through His followers. When a branch is connected to the vine, it’s tapped into the potential of the vine, in this case, Christ Himself.

This is why *abiding* is essential. This is a key word in John’s gospel, appearing eleven times in this chapter and forty times in the book. It can mean “remain, dwell, lodge, stay, continue, be present,” and speaks of inward, enduring, personal communion.

That’s abide. But let’s go deeper. What does it mean to abide *in Christ*? Two things.

First, *abiding in Christ involves accepting Jesus as personal Savior*. It’s not enough merely to know about Jesus. To abide in Christ, a person must believe in Him and put full trust in His saving work. That’s what Jesus indicated in John 6:56 when He said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood *remains* in me, and I in him.”

⁸ There’s a sense in which abiding in Jesus is synonymous with believing in Jesus. John 3:15 says, “...that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

The Christian life begins when we choose to abide in Christ, when we enter into a personal connection with Him, when He becomes our home.

Second, *abiding in Christ involves continued fellowship with Christ*. Again, the term carries the idea of “continuing,” even “persevering.” True believers persevere in their belief in Jesus, as He Himself said in John 8:31. “If you continue in My word, then you are my disciples indeed.”

It's this second sense in which Jesus is using the term in John 15:5. Abide is a present tense verb which indicates this is not a one-time act, but a pattern of life. And this brings us to a second potential result in Jesus' promise.

2. *The person who does NOT abide in Christ will NOT produce fruit (6)*. Jesus says in verse 6, “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

If you sever a branch from the main stem, what happens? The branch wilts, shrivels up, and dies. And there's one thing for sure you *won't* get from a severed branch. Heat? Yes, in the fire. But fruit, no.

What happens to a person who does *not* abide in Christ? Jesus uses shocking verbs, including *throw away* [“cast forth” in the KJV], *wither*, *gather*, *burn*. A dismal picture.

Is Jesus talking about Christians here? Is He saying a true Christian can be *thrown away* and lose his relationship with Christ?

Again, that's what some say, and they point to verses like this to prove the point. But when we compare Scripture with Scripture, which we must always do to establish doctrinal convictions, the point is inconsistent with the rest of Jesus' teaching.

Jesus has already established the security of His people in earlier teaching sessions in John's gospel. For instance, John 3:16 says, “Whoever believes in him shall *not perish* but *have eternal life*.” If a person truly believes in Jesus, this won't happen. They won't be cut off and perish. And this will happen. They *have* eternal life and always will.

In John 4:14 Jesus told the woman at the well, “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to *eternal life*.” When a person receives the gift Jesus offers, it doesn't stop until the fullness of eternal life is experienced.

Later Jesus said in John 6:39, “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.” How many will Jesus lose? *None*, He says.

Then in the pinnacle text, John 10:28, the Good Shepherd said this about His sheep. “I give them *eternal life*, and they shall *never* perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.” And to make it doubly sure, He says in verse 29, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; *no one can snatch them* out of my Father's hand.”

So whatever Jesus is saying in John 15:6, it's not that that a true Christian can lose his salvation. Jesus would never let that happen. He does not lose even one of His sheep. When He gives a person eternal life, that's what the person experiences, *eternal life*.

So what *is* Jesus saying in John 15:6? Who are these branches that are thrown away and burned? He's saying that just as there are two types of branches in the vine (branches that bear fruit and branches that do not bear fruit), there are two types of people who have contact with Him.

Both are exposed to His message. Both respond to His message. Both follow Him. But upon closer inspection, a deficiency becomes apparent. One responds with genuine

saving faith, as evidenced by the appearance of fruit. But the other responds like the man who just moments earlier, walked away from Jesus.

Just two chapters earlier John records this tragic revelation in John 13:30, "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, *he went out*. And it was night." For three years Judas Iscariot looked like a disciple, yet in the end, he left. He went out.

Did Judas lose his salvation? No. He never had it in the first place. That's not just conjecture, but what Jesus Himself said in John 13:10, "And you are clean [Greek *katharos*, the same word used in John 15:3], though not every one of you." Judas was not clean. He never had been.

You say, "I have a friend who 'got saved' years ago. He was really on fire. But he hasn't come to church for a long time, and he seems to have no interest in the Lord. Are you saying he isn't saved?"

Only God knows your friend's heart. Yet John gives us an important test in 1 John 2. Apparently, members of the early church were upset by a similar question. Some parishioners who had once been very active had left, had walked away from the assembly. What about them? Pastor John gives this explanation in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained [from the Greek *meno*, "to abide or continue"] with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."

A true Christian abides in Christ and therefore with Christ's people. And Christ lives through that person (that branch) and produces fruit on it for all to see.

Those are the results of abiding. What about the responsibilities?

B. Jesus identifies the responsibilities of abiding (7-8). "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

Jesus says abiding involves three essentials.

1. *It takes contact (7a).* Jesus doesn't tell us to bear fruit here. Though that's the objective of the vine, that's not our primary responsibility. This is. *Abide*. Abide in Me, He says. Why is that? Because if we abide in Him, the fruit will come.

Are you frustrated with a lack of fruit in your life? You say, "Yes, and I want to be fruitful, but I don't how. What should I do?" Jesus' answer is both simple, and profound. Abide in Me, and you will bear fruit. My friend, make it your priority aim to be in constant contact with Christ.

2. *It takes communication (7b).* "If you abide in me *and my words abide in you.*" Notice the vital link between abiding in Christ and the words of Christ. If we don't listen to our Savior's words, we won't abide. We can't. No communication, no intimacy. No communication, no fruit.

How do we communicate with Christ? As in any relationship, good communication involves a two-way dialogue. He speaks, and we listen. We speak, and He listens. Jesus first emphasizes the priority of His speech. *If my words abide in you*, He says. Christ speaks to us through His words, words He communicated to John and the other apostles, who then wrote them down, which we now possess in this holy Book.

Friends, the Bible is essential for fruitfulness. If we're going to have Christ's words abiding in us, we need to saturate our minds with what He has said. Listening to sermons is good, and so is reading good books. But friends, there's no substitute for having a personal, consistent intake of this book *His Holy Word*.

Do you know how to nourish your soul with your Shepherd's words? If you're dependent on others for your scriptural intake, it's time to change. Make it your goal in the next six months to learn how to study the Bible. If you'd like help, just ask. Your Sunday School teachers and youth leaders would love to help you.

Yet there's another side to abiding. He speaks and we listen. Then we speak and He listens. What did Jesus say happens when we abide in Him and His words abide in us? Listen to the rest of verse 7, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, *ask whatever you wish*, and it will be done for you." This is staggering, yet true. The word rendered "ask" is one of the strongest Greek words regarding prayer. As commentator G. Campbell Morgan says, it means "demand your due."⁹

The Word. And prayer. Both are vital. Abiding involves communication.

3. *It takes commitment (8)*. The commitment that Jesus highlights in verse 8, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

The word *glorify* is a marvelous word. It comes from the Hebrew word *kabhad* which means "heavy" or "weighty". We glorify God when we make His reputation weighty. The Greek word for glory is *doxas* from which we get our word "doxology". Glory and reputation go hand in hand. When we raise God's reputation in the eyes of others, we glorify God. When we distract from or discredit God's reputation, we do not glorify God.

Herein lies what should be our highest ambition in life. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever."

This is the object of it all. And it happens when we abide in Christ.

Make It Personal: Resolve to purposefully depend on Jesus for everything.

To abide in Christ, one must first be connected to Christ. Are you? Christianity is not just another religion. It's not merely a way of life. It's a relationship between a person and a personal God. So if I am going to see the fruit of Christ in my life, then I must be connected to Christ.

Jesus Christ came to earth two thousand years ago, in fulfillment of the God's eternal plan to save a people for His glory. He died as a substitute on the Cross. He rose again on the third day and later ascended to His Father's right hand. He sent His Spirit into the world. He is a *real Person*.

Do you know Him? To abide in Him, you must know Him personally.

And yet, this is just the beginning. Friends, when we're abiding in Christ, we're allowing Him to reproduce His life in us and through us. It's His agenda that matters most to us, His will, His honor. It's having people see *Him* in our lives, and come to know Him through our influence.

When I abide in Christ, it makes me a better husband and father. When I abide in Christ, it affects my performance on the job and in school. Why? Because I want my life to please Him, living in *purposeful reliance on Him*.

Closing Song: #210 "*Jesus Paid It All*" (all four verses)

Communion

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Next week: "*Suffering with and for Christ*" Colossians 1:24-29

⁹ P. 254.