

Abiding in Christ

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” (John 15:4)

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It was Thursday evening, and Jesus gathered with the twelve in the upper room. After eating the Passover meal, Jesus institutes His supper. During this time in the upper room, a dispute erupts among the twelve as to who is the greatest. Jesus used the occasion to teach that the greatest is the one who serves rather than is served, and He washes the disciples feet. It is also during this time that Jesus identifies Judas as the betrayer and excuses him from their midst. Further, He prophesies that Peter would deny him three times before the cock crows twice. It was here in the upper room that Jesus delivers His farewell address to His disciples. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. ⁴And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (John 14:1-4).

Within this farewell address is our text — John 15:4. One of the most important actions the disciples needed to take upon the departure of Jesus is to maintain a spiritual relationship with the Messiah. For this reason, Jesus said in John 15:1-8:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. ²Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ³Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. ⁴Abide 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. ⁵I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. ⁶If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. ⁸Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

Notice again our text, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” To understand the “except,” we must first understand the context in which it is found.

In this text, the vine is Jesus, the husbandman is God, and the branches are the disciples. Jesus said He is the “true vine” or the genuine vine. The husbandman is a person who dresses, fertilizes, and takes care of the vine and the branches. Unlike some who teach the branches are the various denominations, Jesus said the disciples are the branches. Notice in verse 5, Jesus said, “ye are the branches.”

As a husbandman, God expects the branches to bear fruit. If they do not, they will be taken away (that is, they will be removed.) This ought to forever answer the Calvinist doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” Obviously, a branch must be attached before it can be removed, and to be

attached means that it once lived. Those who believe in the impossibility of apostasy must believe that dead branches were once a part of the living vine of Christ. Such simply could not be true for the vine of Christ provides life for its branches. A living branch can die because it is no longer getting the nourishment of the vine. For this reason, notice the stress upon being genuinely attached to the vine:

- “Every branch in me” (verse 2).
- “Abide in me” (verse 4).
- “Abide in the vine” (verse 4)
- Again, “abide in me” (verse 4)
- And “abide in me” (verse 5).
- “For without me ye can do nothing” (verse 5).
- “If a man abide not in me” (verse 6).
- “Abide in me” (verse 7).

So, just as a branch is dependent upon the vine, we as Christians are dependent upon Christ.

What Does Abiding in Christ Mean?

In order to abide in Christ, a person must be “in Christ.” How, then, does a person get into Christ? In other words, how does a person get into a right relationship with Christ? The same way a person becomes a Christian. When a person is born again, he or she is born into a right relationship with God. He or she becomes God’s children — the children of God, and Christ becomes his or her elder brother. So, how does a person get into Christ? Listen to the inspired answer. In Galatians 3:27, Paul wrote, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Also, in Romans 6:3 Paul wrote, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” When a person is baptized for the remission of sin, he or she is baptized into Christ, and at that point, they begin to abide in Christ.

Notice also from our text of John 15, Jesus said, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (verse 3). The way a person becomes clean is by obedience to the word of Christ. This, too, is associated with baptism. Peter wrote, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23). Baptism is the new birth (John 3:3-5), and the new birth comes about because of incorruptible seed (the word of God) planted in the hearts of men (see also, 1 Corinthians 4:15; James 1:18). Thus, the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

“To abide” means to remain, continue, or dwell. Thus, to abide in Christ is to continue in Christ. Abiding in Him is more than just the new birth. The new birth places a person in Christ, but we

must also continue in Christ to have the promise of life everlasting. In part, this is the point Jesus is making in our text. Remember He said, “for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:6). In order to be a fervent, active branch, we must continually receive the nourishment that comes from the vine. No superficial attachment will suffice!

To abide in Christ (as a branch attached to the vine) means Christ (as the vine) is the source of life. Certainly, we understand Christ is the creator of the universe. John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”² The same was in the beginning with God.³ All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1-3; see also 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). Not only is He the creator, He is also the upholder or “sustainer” of the universe. Paul wrote, “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17; see also Hebrews 1:3). In other words, not only did He create the universe, He upholds or sustains it. He keeps it going and maintains it.

Having said all this, however, Christ is more than just the creator and upholder of the universe. He is the very source of life. “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). In John 5:26 Jesus said, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.” Furthermore, Jesus is “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29), “the bread of life” (John 6:48), “the light of life” (John 8:12), “the prince of life” (Acts 3:15), and “the word of life” (1 John 1:1). For this reason, He offers “the promise of life” (2 Timothy 1:1), to write our names in “the book of life” (Philippians 4:3), to give us a “crown of life” (Revelation 2:10), and provides access to “the tree of life” (Revelation 22:14). It is no wonder why John would later write, “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12).

In John 10:10 Jesus said, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” Within the pages of the Bible, there are several Koiné Greek words that are translated “life.” One word is “PSUCHE” (ψυχή). This word means breathe and is often used with reference to life that man, animals, and plants have (*The Analytical Greek Lexicon*). Another word is “BIOS” (βίος). This has reference to the period or duration of the natural life. A third word is “ZOA” (ζωή). This is “life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it.” (*Expository Dictionary of the New Testament*, W.E. Vine). This is the life that Jesus promises to His followers. It is not merely existence. It is not existence in this material/physical world of pain and woe. It is the “abundant life” that flows from vine to branch.

What Is the Opposite of Abiding in Christ?

Abiding in darkness is the opposite of abiding in Christ. In John 12:46 Jesus said, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” Light and darkness are set in contrast. Light signifies truth, righteousness, and morality while darkness signifies error, sin, and moral corruption. Thus, those abiding in Christ should not abide in darkness. Jesus is the light of the world, and He came into the world to provide light. Yet for the most part, mankind has rejected the light because they love darkness (John 3:19). They do not

want light because light reveals their wicked way of life. Light dispels darkness, and because of pride, mankind does not want to have their sin made manifest.

Another opposite of abiding in Christ is abiding in unbelief. Paul wrote in Romans 11:23, “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.” Contextually, the Jews were the natural branches who were cut off because of unbelief. If the Gentiles also abide in unbelief, God would cut them off as well. As Christians, we must be careful to abide in Christ for in not doing so, we too shall be cut off.

In 2 John 9, John records, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.” The opposite of abiding in Christ or abiding in the doctrine of Christ is abiding not in the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ is the doctrine that Christ teaches Himself and through His inspired writers. It is not simply doctrines about Christ. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. That covenant is His will and testament. He issued it. He is its author and originator. Thus, it is the doctrine of Christ. That is, the doctrine belonging to Christ. Contextually, the person who “abideth not in the doctrine of Christ” is the person who has followed the deceiver and antichrist. Because of such, he or she has lost those things for which they have labored. They are no longer abiding in the doctrine of Christ because they have followed the pernicious ways of the false teacher. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).

In the end, the person who abides in darkness, abides in unbelief, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ will have the wrath of God abiding on him. Jesus said, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). What a sad state of affairs! This is especially true when a person honestly considers all that God has done for us in order that we may have life. The promise is given to those who abide in Christ that Christ abides in them (John 15:4; 1 John 3:24). However, to those who abide not in Christ, they will have the wrath of God abiding on them. In our text, Jesus said, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6).

What Does Abiding in Christ Require of Me?

First, abiding in Christ requires me to be fruitful. In our text Jesus said, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). In fact, Jesus places great emphasis upon fruitfulness. According to our text, disciples of Jesus should “bear fruit” (verse 2), “bear more fruit” (verse 2), and “bear much fruit” (verse 8).

When speaking of fruit, there are those among us who teach the fruit of a Christian is another Christian. Is this a biblical concept? It is true that Christians are to be evangelistic (Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 16:15-16). However, being evangelistic is not necessarily raising up children unto God but rather planting seed. It is the responsibility of all Christians to plant the seed of the kingdom which is the word of God (Luke 8:11). That seed will fall by the wayside, on rock, among thorns, and on good ground (Luke 8:5-8). Oftentimes the age, mind-set, or culture of a society will

determine the kind of soil that is within the heart of men. If a person spent years in a particular city where the hearts of people are hard and has few if any converts, does that mean his work is unproductive and fruitless? No, not necessarily. Jeremiah is a case in point. He spent many years preaching, teaching, and prophesying, but with few converts. Yet, he had a fruitful and successful work. Noah also spent years preaching, and his only converts were his sons and their wives. Yet, he, too, had a fruitful and successful work. How can we say such? Because of Isaiah 55:11 which says, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." If we plant God's word in the soil of human heart, it will accomplish what God intends for it to accomplish. Besides this, there are other fruits that Christians bear such as "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Second, abiding in Christ requires me to be clean. In our text Jesus said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). The disciples had been cleansed from past sins, but they needed continual cleansing. Remember Jesus is preparing them for His departure. He wanted them to remain pure in order that they may be approved of God. Notice Jesus identifies the source of continual cleansing — the word of Jesus. Christ's teaching would enable them to obtain the needed cleansing from sins. Of course, God does the cleansing, but it is conditional upon our faithful adherence and obedience to the word of God.

Third, abiding in Christ requires me to be pruned. Any agriculturalist knows that sometimes pruning is necessary for increased production. For this reason Jesus said, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2). The branches that are unproductive are pruned away and cast into the fire (John 15:6), and this leaves only the productive branches to receive the full nourishment of the vine. By such, the productive branches become even more productive. The one who does the pruning is God. He is the husbandman who dresses, fertilizes, and takes care of the vine and the branches. The way Christians are pruned is by teaching, training, and discipline. By such, a Christian grows and becomes more productive.

Fourth, abiding in Christ requires me to walk as Christ walked. 1 John 2:6 says, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." What does it mean to walk as He walked? The walk spoken of here is the walk of life. We, as Christians, are to live life as God would have us to live, and as Christ lived. Within the context of 1 John, it is to "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7) which includes fellowship with God, walking not in darkness, keeping His commandments, and loving one another. If we confess abiding in Christ, we ought to live life as Christ lived it.

Fifth, abiding in Christ requires me to love the brethren. John, the apostle of love, wrote, "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (1 John 2:10). Since Christ is the light, then to abide in the light is to abide in Christ. In the previous verse, John emphasizes that the person who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is in darkness. Thus, the person claiming to be in the light must love his brother. A casual reading of 1 John indicates this is a common theme throughout this small epistle.

- 1 John 3:11 – “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”
- 1 John 3:14 – “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”
- 1 John 4:7 – “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”
- 1 John 4:20 – “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”
- 1 John 4:21 – “And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”
- 1 John 5:1 – “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”
- 1 John 5:2 – “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.”

Sixth, abiding in Christ requires me to keep God’s word. John, the apostle of love, not only emphasized love, but he also taught commandment keeping — yea, even emphasized it. In 1 John 3:24 John wrote, “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” It ought to be obvious that John is alluding to the words of Jesus recorded in John 14:23 which says, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” As with love, commandment keeping is a common theme within this small epistle.

- 1 John 2:5 – “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.”
- 1 John 3:22 – “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”
- 1 John 5:1 – “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”
- 1 John 5:2 – “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.”
- 1 John 5:3 – “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

Seventh, abiding in Christ requires me to confess Christ. 1 John 4:15 says, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” In this verse, the word “dwelleth” is the same original word as often translated “abideth.” (It is translated as such in both the American Standard and New King James versions.) Within the New Testament, there are three confessions. In order to become a Christian, a person must confess with the mouth, “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (Romans 10:9-10). Then, there is the confession of sins as in 1 John 1:9. Finally, there is the confession of life in which a person confesses Jesus by the way he or she lives. The confession spoken of in this passage is the confession of the mouth as indicated by the Greek aorist tense. As a result of this confession, there is a closeness and a continual abiding with God.

In conclusion, consider the benefits and rewards of abiding in Christ. One benefit and reward is a fruitful prayer life. If we as Christians are fruitful, Jesus promises our prayers will be answered. Within our text, Jesus said, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). Of course this is conditional upon abiding in Christ and all that it entails. Knowing that Jesus would soon depart, this would have been a great comfort to the eleven apostles who had gathered in the upper room with Him. It is also of great comfort to all faithful children of God.

Another benefit and reward for abiding in Christ is the assurance that God abides with us. In his first epistle John declares, “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). Again, in this verse, the word “dwelleth” is the same original word as often translated “abideth.” (Also, it is translated “abideth” in the American Standard Version and “abides” in the New King James Version.) This reciprocal and mutual abiding indicates a close communion and fellowship between God and His children.

Finally, consider the promise of 1 John 2:17, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” If we abide in Christ, we shall abide forever! What a marvelous promise! Surely, it is a promise that should motivate each one of us to abide in Christ.