

John 15:1-17

"Abide"

Imago Dei Church | 2/24/19 | 3 Services

INTRODUCTION

I love this text. There is so much good stuff in John 15.

It's about a relationship with Jesus.

It's about love.

It's about good works.

It's about community.

And it's about mission.

If you're a follower of Jesus, it's an incredible passage to commit to memory. If you're not, I want to invite you to consider its claims.

Main Idea: True disciples of Jesus abide in an intimate, life-giving, fruit-producing relationship with their Savior.

This passage challenges us all. It challenges the legalists among us because it tells us that **Christianity is not about your performance but about knowing and walking with the person of Jesus Christ**. It doesn't matter how much church you go to or Bible you memorize if you don't have personal communion with your Creator.

This passage also challenges the spiritualist who think that all that matters is them and Jesus. They just want to meditate and commune with God. But this text tells us that **true communion with God leads to a transformed and active life with the community of God's people.**

This passage also challenges those who are giving themselves over to their sin and rebellion. **It has warning**—God is a righteous judge. **It also has hope**—Jesus is a life-giving Savior for those repent and believe.

So let's look at this text in two parts. In the first part, I want to consider the metaphor laid out in these verses. And then I want to consider the idea of "abiding" and its fruits in the Christian life.

1. THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

(1-8)

Jesus is using an image to help us understand our relationship to him and to God the Father.

In the metaphor, there are really three main components: the vine, the vinedresser, and the branches. And we'll take them each in turn, but they are obviously intertwined throughout these first 8 verses.

A. THE VINE (1)

[1] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

This is the last of Jesus' 7 "I am" statements

- 1) I am the bread of life (6:35)
- 2) I am the light of the world (8:12)
- 3) I am the gate (10:9)
- 4) I am the good shepherd (10:11)
- 5) I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
- 6) I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)

In each of these, Jesus has **explicitly identified himself with Israel's God** in the OT Scriptures by using the divine name, "I am."

By saying "I am the true vine" though, Jesus is not only identifying with the God of Israel, but with Israel herself.

In several key places in the OT, Israel is referred to as God's vine, planted to bear his fruit.

They were chosen and loved to fulfill his purpose.

But you'll notice that Jesus is the TRUE vine. He's putting himself in contrast with the false or failed vine: Israel.

See, God has set the nation of Israel apart **for the purpose of making his name great among the nations** and to be **a light to the Gentiles**.

They were supposed to **connect the lost peoples of the world with their Creator...but they failed**.

Hosea 10:1-2

[1] Israel is a luxuriant vine
 that yields its fruit.
 The more his fruit increased,
 the more altars he built;
 as his country improved,
 he improved his pillars.
 [2] Their heart is false;
 now they must bear their guilt.
 The LORD will break down their altars
 and destroy their pillars. (ESV)

So Jesus comes along here and says, *"I'm the true Israel. I'm the better Israel. What they were supposed to be doing was really pointing to what I'm actually doing. **They were a failed precursor to the real thing. But I'm here.**"*

So Jesus is the vine. The true vine. The true Israel. God's plan for the salvation of the whole world centers on him and him alone.

(APP) Why we preach the gospel that we do.
 (APP) Why we read the Bible the way we do.

B. THE VINEDRESSER (1-2, 8)

[1] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

The Father is the one who tends the vine. What we know about the vinedresser is this: **he is supremely concerned with the fruitfulness of the vine.**

[2] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

See? Regardless of what state a branch is in, he's **going to act to help the vine reach its maximum fruitfulness**. That's his concern.

Verse 8 says so explicitly:

[8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

The vinedresser's goal is to see his vine produce fruit. **The Lord's goal in your life and mine is to have us produce fruit**. That's what he's calling us to in this chapter—bear fruit. As the Lord looks on those who are in Christ bearing fruit, he is *pleased*. He is *honored*. He is *glorified*.

So, what about the branches?

C. THE BRANCHES (2-8)

Verses 2-8 tell us that **those claiming to be disciples of Jesus are the branches**. That's me and many of you.

But it also tells us there are really 2 kinds of branches: (a) those that bear fruit and (b) those that do not.

[2] Every branch in me that **does not bear fruit** he takes away, and every branch that **does bear fruit** he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

If we take them in reverse order, we see that the vinedresser prunes the branches that DO bear fruit. Why? Because he **wants them to bear more fruit**. He cuts away maybe some extra limbs or some dying leaves. (ILL: tomato plants).

(APP) This tells us that if you are a Christian, the Lord is not done with you. He wants to continually prune you for his service. (Cf. Heb. 12)

Christian, do not despise the pruning discipline of the Lord. He is not disciplining you because he hates you but because he loves you and wants to use you in his kingdom. (APP: everyday discipline in the church)

But there's another kind of branch: one that DOES NOT bear fruit. This type is "taken away" by the vinedresser. Verse 6 makes the same point:

[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.

What's this? **Does this mean that a Christian that isn't performing well enough can lose their salvation?** No. This is where you can't press the metaphor too far.

Jesus is not saying that there are 2 kinds of Christians: pruned fruitful ones and discarded unfruitful ones. **He's saying there are fruitful believers and false believers.** He's saying there's only one kind of Christ-follower: the kind that bears fruit.

Someone who claims Jesus but bears no fruit has no reason to believe they are a Christian and is in a place of **spiritual danger**. Failure to abide in the vine means **life is not in us**. We're not attached to the source, which is Jesus.

However, Jesus reminds the disciples in front of him that they *are* true believers. Why?

[3] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

This is where Jesus protects us against thinking that we need to produce fruit to save ourselves. NO. He tells them why they are clean. It's because of his work in their lives. HE is the savior. They are the ones who bear fruit.

APP: we must never mistake fruit-bearing with salvation. We bear fruit because of his saving grace, not to earn or secure it.

Some of you are trying to produce spiritual fruit to earn or gain confidence in your salvation, and I want

to remind you not to look at yourself but at the one whose word can make you clean. Look at Christ, not at yourself. That's where you will be forgiven your sins and made whole. He has secured your salvation with his death. Believe in him, not in yourself.

If that's true, though, what is the disciple's role? What should the branch do? ABIDE.

UNION with Christ is the foundation of COMMUNION with Christ.

[4] Abide in me, and I in you.

Remain. That's what this word means. Stay. Put down roots. Set up shop. Get comfortable. Hold on and don't let go.

Jesus is saying that true disciples are invited (commanded!) to remain in an intimate relationship with Christ.

This is one of my favorite images in all of Scripture, because it explodes what I want the Christian life to be about. I want the Christian life to be about how good a person I can be, or how little trouble I can get in, or even how many Bible verses I can memorize.

But this simple little word explodes all of that and invites me to exchange my performance-oriented, knowledge-obsessed Christianity for a personal

communion with God that is intimate and life-giving. Knowing God. Walking with Jesus. That's what Jesus wants from his disciples.

Why? I think there are at least 2 reason:

- 1) He created us to know and be known by him. We were created to be in a relationship with God. To live with and before him in perfect harmony. Sin ruined that. The gospel restores it.
- 2) The second reason Jesus calls us to abide in him is *function*. We're desperate for him. That's what 4-7 are about. We CAN'T produce fruit on our own. We need him.

As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [5] 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.

But if we abide in Christ...

[7] If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

...if we stay connected to the vine such that his life and his power and his purposes are coursing through us, then we can bear much fruit because he works it in us—into our provision and into his provision.

And in so doing, God is glorified.

[8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

So you can see that **true disciples of Jesus abide in an intimate, life-giving, fruit-producing relationship with their Savior.**

2. ABIDING AND ITS FRUITS

(9-17)

A. ABIDE IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST THROUGH OBEDIENCE (9-10)

[9] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

[10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Parallel between (a) the Father and the Son and (b) Christ and his disciples. We abide in his love by obedience.

This does not mean we *keep* his love by obedience, as though he's waiting to take it away. Rather, we *experience the fullness of his love* because our disobedience is not clouding it.

(ILL) The fear of school when you haven't done your homework.

Obedience is the context and setting for enjoying the fullness of Christ's love.

(APP) Are you missing out on experiencing the love of Christ, not because it's not there, but because you are not walking in obedience to his commandments?

B. ABIDE IN THE JOY OF CHRIST THROUGH OBEDIENCE (11)

[11] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

C. ABIDE WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST IN LOVE (12-15, 17)

[12] "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command you. [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

[17] These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

The context: the church of Christ (12, 17)

The standard and example: the love of Christ (12-13)

The assurance: the revelation of Christ (14-15)

(APP) An essential aspect of our fruitfulness in the gospel is the loving community that we share with Christ's people. And we share it not because it's easy or convenient or perfect or because everyone else loved you first. We abide with the body of Christ in love because Jesus first loved us.

D. ABIDE IN THE GRACE OF CHRIST ON MISSION (16)

[16] **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide**, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

You received grace so you can proclaim grace.

Disciple-making is not a special program for the elite few but the gracious privilege of the saved masses.

E. ABIDE IN THE POWER OF CHRIST THROUGH THE WORD AND PRAYER (16B, 7)

Twice in this passage we are called to ask the Father. More than that, we are promised his answer.

[16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

[7] If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

CONCLUSION

Abide. Consider the privilege we have as Christ's people to know him intimately, walk with him daily, and bear fruit that abides and brings him great glory.