***Abiding with Christ***

**With Jesus in the Upper Room, John 15:1-17 March 21, 2021**

***“I am the vine; you are the branches.   
If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;   
apart from me you can do nothing.”*John 15:5**

**Introduction: Between the cross and a hard place**

*18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you . . . . I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

John 15:18-19 🡪 John 16:33

1) Jesus preaches the ultimate “one sentence sermon” – but he has a great model in Psalm 80

2) “Bearing much fruit” will not endear me to the world!

**Branches and the Vine**

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”*

John 15

1) Vine, Gardener and source of the fruit – this sounds Trinitarian to me!

2) “Cut off” or “lift up”? Both work – it depends on who the “we” is  
 Passages for study: Isaiah 5; Psalm 80; Matthew 3:7-10; Matthew 7:15-23; Mark 4; Romans 11

3) Everyone agrees: the most important element of the *ordo salutis* is union with Christ

4) Bearing fruit is the expected [necessary?] result of our organic connection to the Vine

**The answer to what kind of fruit? Ask for “much fruit!”**

*5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

John 15

1) Fruit as simply obedience, new converts, love or character are “reductionistic” (D. A. Carson)

2) The warning is real (see Hebrews 5:11-6:12 for another example of a “real” warning)

3) “Remaining” is our first experience of the “rooms” Jesus is preparing in John 14:2 (see Psalm 90)

**Sweet manure (remember Luke 13:8-9) for the branches (thanks to Deffinbaugh)**

*9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.*

John 15

1) We abide in Jesus’ love

2) We keep Jesus’ commandments

3) We love the brothers and sisters (see John 13:34-35)

4) We have great joy

5) We change from servants to friends

**Resources for further studies of Jesus’ Upper Room Discourse**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on John at <https://open.life.church/items/179216-john-poster-jpg>

Spurgeon has a classic sermons at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-washing-his-disciples-feet/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-washing-his-disciples-feet/%23flipbook/) and [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0005.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0005.htm) and   
[*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/a-sharp-knife-for-the-vine-branches/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/a-sharp-knife-for-the-vine-branches/%23flipbook/)

J. C. Ryle’s commentary at [*https://www.monergism.com/lord-are-you-going-wash-my-feet-john-136-15*](https://www.monergism.com/lord-are-you-going-wash-my-feet-john-136-15)

Deffinbaugh’s sermons at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17*](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17) ,  
[*https://bible.org/seriespage/33-having-friend-high-places-john-141-31*](https://bible.org/seriespage/33-having-friend-high-places-john-141-31) and

I have really appreciated D. A. Carson’s commentary in the Pillar New Testament Commentary series (Eerdmans, 1991) and Earl Palmer’s *The Intimate Gospel* (Word Books, 1978)

The two resources on our union with Christ are Johm Murray’s *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Eerdmans, 1955) and Rankin Wilbourne’s *Union with Christ* (David C. Cook, 2016). I also recommend Marcus Peter’s short study at [*https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/*](https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/)

Leon Morris has a short essay on the atonement in John’s gospel at [*http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/CTR-NT/Morris-JohnsAtonement-CTR.pdf*](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/CTR-NT/Morris-JohnsAtonement-CTR.pdf)

My old professor Carl Laney has an essay on the agricultural perspective of the vine and branches at   
[*https://www.monergism.com/analogy-vine*](https://www.monergism.com/analogy-vine)

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# Abiding in Christ (John 15:1-17) Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17*](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17)

### Introduction

This past week, I attended the board meeting of the Urban Evangelical Mission (formerly BEE—Black Evangelistic Enterprise). I have been associated with this fine organization for nearly 20 years. I look forward to getting together with friends and fellow board members like Dr. Ruben Conner, John Dodd, Dr. Willie Peterson, Terry Woodson, and Dr. Tony Evans. This was a lunch meeting, and, as always, most of the board members were pressed for time. We moved through our agenda as quickly as we could so that one of the men could make an appointment. But when we formally adjourned the meeting, the rest of the men remained seated at the conference table. It was just as though we all sensed that the meeting was not really over, or at least that it was not yet time to go. For the next 20 or 30 minutes, we just sat and talked, about our lives, our ministries, our relationships, our struggles.

When I got home, it dawned on me that something out of the ordinary had happened. It was not like any of the meetings I had attended in the last 20 years. Nothing really dramatic happened; it was just a relaxed time of sharing in the things of our Lord. It has happened before a few times in other meetings, but this time was special. It was like a few moments of calm in the midst of a storm. Together, we shared a few moments of solitude and fellowship. I think it must have been something like those few hours our Lord shared with His disciples in the Upper Room, which John is describing in our text. In spite of their distress and sorrow, I think that as the eleven disciples looked back on these final, intimate moments with their Lord, they sensed that something very special had happened, even if they did not understand it at the time.

Not everyone in that Upper Room found these moments so peaceful and refreshing. The time Judas spent in that Upper Room must have been almost unbearable for him. A good portion of chapter 13 is devoted to Judas and to his departure that night, a departure that forever sealed his doom. As they sat at the table, Jesus shocked every one of His disciples by indicating that one of them was about to betray Him. The eleven believing disciples were perplexed and greatly troubled. But imagine what it must have been like for Judas. Jesus knew what Judas was up to! What would happen next? What would Jesus do? What would the disciples do? (Peter, we know, was armed with a sword—see 18:10.) Judas must have been wide-eyed as he watched Peter gesture to John, and as this disciple asked his Lord (who seems to have been just on the other side of Jesus) who the traitor was. Jesus indicated that the traitor was the one to whom He would hand the bread He had dipped. Judas’ heart must have stopped when Jesus handed him the bread. Surely the others would now know that he was the traitor! Our Lord’s words to Judas, “**What you are about to do, do quickly**” (13:27), must have been “music to the ears of Judas,” who couldn’t get out of the Upper Room quickly enough. And all of this was calmly brought about by our all-knowing Lord, so that His death would perfectly fulfill the plans, purposes, and prophecies of God.

After the departure of Judas, Jesus announces to His disciples that He will be leaving them behind, and that they will not be able to follow Him where He is going, at least for a while. The disciples are caught completely off guard. Peter seeks to assure Jesus of his dedication, supposing (it would seem) that this might convince Jesus that he could be taken along, even if the other disciples could not be trusted. What a blow our Lord’s words were to Peter. Did Peter wish to assure Jesus that he was trustworthy? In but a short time, he would deny his Master, not once, but three times!

Peter was silent from this point on, but not the rest of the disciples. Chapter 14 is John’s record of the “question and answer session” that takes place in response to what Jesus is saying. The disciples supposed Jesus meant that they would no longer enjoy the intimate relationship with Him that they had been privileged to experience up to this point in time. How wrong they were! It was our Lord’s “departure” that made it possible for them to enjoy His presence and fellowship more intimately than they had ever experienced it before.

In our text in John chapter 15, we come to the final “**I am**” of John’s Gospel. The words of our text are some of the most familiar words in the Gospel of John, but this does not necessarily mean they are well understood. Many are the interpretations of this passage, and while people are drawn to this text, they are also perplexed by it:

… Christians have long been attracted to these verses, both because they are profound and because they are perplexing. They are profound in that they deal with certain deep realities in the Christian faith. … But the passage is as perplexing as it is profound. Exactly what kind of fruit are we expected to bear? Does any believer really enjoy the extravagant prayer promises in verses 7 and 8? Exactly what does ‘remaining in Christ’ really mean? Above all, how is it that branches are said to be in this vine, yet fruitless? And how can these branches be cut off and destroyed?[37](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4067_1612639)

Texans use the expression, “between a rock and a hard place.” Verses 1-17 deal with the disciples of our Lord as those who are caught “between a rock and a hard place.” The “rock” is our Lord’s distressing announcement that He will be leaving His disciples behind (chapter 13). The “hard place” is that the Jews will turn against them: *18 “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. But because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they obeyed my word, they will obey yours too. 21 But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know the one who sent me”* ([John 15:18-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).[38](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4070_1613661)

1 *“I have told you all these things so that you will not fall away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogue, yet a time is coming when the one who kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 They will do these things because they have not known the Father or me. 4 But I have told you these things so that when their time comes you will remember that I told you about them*” ([John 16:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The disciples are not only going to be left behind by their Master, they are also going to be rejected by their peers. Yet in all of this, they are not being abandoned by their Lord. He is sending His Spirit to dwell within them, uniting them with Himself and with one another. The disciples will now be able to “abide in Him” in a way they never could have previously. Things are about to change significantly, but all for the better. Later on, this same change is recognized by the Apostle Paul: 15 *And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised. 16 So then from now on we acknowledge no one from an outward human point of view. Even though we have known Christ from such a human point of view,* ***now we do not know him in that way any longer****. 17 So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away, see, what is new has come!* ([2 Corinthians 5:15-17](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

This new relationship with Christ is described by our Lord as “abiding in Him.”[39](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4075_1615192) It is apparent that the central concept in these verses is *abiding* in Christ. Eight times in these eight verses the word rendered “**abide**” is found.[40](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4076_1615778) I know from my own experience that *abiding in Christ* is one of my greatest struggles. From what others tell me, it is their struggle, too. It is perhaps the most serious failure among Christians. The benefits of abiding in Christ are as great as the dangers of neglecting it. Let us first seek to learn what it means to *abide* in Christ, and then let us strive to do so, by His grace, to His glory, and for our good.

### “I Am the True Vine” (15:1-3)

*1 “I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. 2 He takes away every branch that does not bear fruit in me. He prunes every*[*41*](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4080_1616622) *branch that bears fruit so that it will bear more fruit. 3 You are clean already because of the word that I have spoken to you.”*

In the Old Testament, the “**vine**” is a well-known symbol for the nation Israel.[42](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4082_1617584) *1 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His* ***vineyard****: My Well-beloved has a* ***vineyard*** *On a very fruitful hill. 2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the* ***choicest vine****. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes. 3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes? 5 And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. 6 I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briers and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it.” 7* ***For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant****. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help* ([Isaiah 5:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV, emphasis mine).

The text in Isaiah speaks of the failure of Israel to produce “**fruit**” as God’s vine. [Psalm 80](javascript:%7b%7d) speaks of this “**vine**” as well, but then changes the focus to “**the branch**,” who appears to be none other than our Lord: 8 *You have brought* ***a vine*** *out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. 9 You prepared room for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land. 10 The hills were covered with its shadow, And the mighty cedars with its boughs. 11 She sent out her boughs to the Sea, And her branches to the River. 12 Why have You broken down her hedges, So that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? 13 The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it. 14 Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And* ***visit this vine*** *15 And the* ***vineyard*** *which Your right hand has planted, And the branch that You made strong for Yourself. 16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance. 17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,* ***Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself****. 18 Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name* ([Psalm 80:8-18](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV, emphasis mine).

In our text, Jesus employs the imagery of a vine to describe the new relationship which His disciples are about to enjoy with Him and with the Father. Our Lord is the “**vine**”; unbelievers are the fruitless branches,[43](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4087_1620630) while believers are the fruit-bearing branches. The grapes are the “**fruit**” which God produces in and through the saints as they draw their life and strength from the “**vine**,” the Lord Jesus Christ. And God the Father is the gardener, who tends the vine, removing dead branches and purifying the living branches.

Jesus speaks of Himself not merely as *a* vine, or even as *the* vine, but as *the* ***true***[44](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4089_1621232) *vine*. He who created the light (and everything else), is called the ***true*** “**light**” in [John 1:9](javascript:%7b%7d). The “**bread**” God gave Israel in the wilderness sustained the lives of the Israelites for a time, but Jesus identifies Himself as the ***true*** “**bread**” that comes down from heaven, because He gives eternal life to all those who partake of Him by faith ([John 6:30-35](javascript:%7b%7d)). In our text, Jesus identifies Himself as the ***true*** “**vine**,” the full and final revelation of all that the “**vine**” anticipated and foreshadowed in the Old Testament. Believers in Jesus (specifically, the disciples) are branches, who are a part of the vine, and yet who need somehow to “**abide**” or “**remain**” in the vine.

The Father is the “**vinedresser**” (NKJV) or “**gardener**” (NET Bible), the One who tends the vine. Every branch which does not produce fruit in the Vine is removed by the Father. As we would expect, this verse is understood differently by students of the Bible. There are two key expressions in verse 2, the translation of which will determine (or justify) our understanding of what our Lord means in this verse. The terms are “***in Me***” and “***takes away***.” If the phrase “**in Me**” indicates that these branches are true believers, then we must either conclude (against a mountain of contrary evidence in John and the rest of the Scriptures) that Christians can lose their salvation, or we must show that “***takes away***” does not refer to eternal condemnation (hell). One solution is to translate the Greek word airw “**lifts up**,” with the sense of helping or assisting. Thus, unfruitful branches are given special care by the Father, with the view to helping them become fruitful. The majority of translations seem to render this verse in a way that indicates that the unfruitful branches are taken away in judgment. This view is consistent with verse 6, which is much more clear about the fate of unfruitful branches, branches which did not abide in the vine. There, unfruitful branches are cast into the fire.

I believe the weight of the evidence falls on the side of that interpretation which concludes that the unfruitful branches are removed from the vine and destroyed.[45](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4092_1624090) In much more blunt language, the unfruitful branches burn in the eternal fire of hell. If this is the case, then how do we explain the phrase “**in Me**” (verse 2)? *Three passages in the Gospels and one in the Book of Romans* help me to understand what Jesus is saying here in verse 2. The *first* is found in Matthew chapter 3: *7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit worthy of repentance! 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ because I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! 10 Even now the ax is ready at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”* ([Matthew 3:7-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In this text, many of the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to John for baptism. They certainly appeared to be identifying themselves with John and his message. John rebukes them because they assumed they were going to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom of God based upon their lineage. They trusted in the fact that they were descendants of Abraham. And yet John warned them of God’s coming wrath. Surely the fruitless “**trees**” here are dead trees—unbelievers—and the fire is that of eternal punishment. Those who believe they are truly saved, and may even appear to be to others, are not really saved, but are destined for the coming wrath of God on the unbelieving.

The *second* passage also comes from the Gospel of Matthew: *15 “Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruit. People don’t gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, do they? 17 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will recognize them by their fruit. 21 Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?’ 23 Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, lawbreakers!’”* ([Matthew 7:15-23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Here, we learn from the lips of our Lord that not everyone who claims to be a spokesman for God is a true prophet. True prophets and false prophets can be distinguished by their “**fruits**.” The people Jesus describes in verses 21 and 22 certainly thought they were true believers, and many others may have thought so too. But Jesus says that in spite of their profession, and in spite of their impressive deeds, He never knew them. It is by one’s fruit that his profession of faith is found to be either true or false. Though they may claim to be the people of God, those who profess faith without producing fruit are cast into the fire of God’s eternal judgment.

The *third* text is from the Gospel of Mark: 1 *Againhe began to teach beside the sea. And a great crowd gathered around him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the sea and all the crowd was on the land by the sea. 2 Hetaught them many things in parables, and in his teaching said to them: 3 “Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it. 5 Otherseed fell on rocky ground where it did not have much soil. Itsprang up at once because the soil was not deep. 6 Whenthe sun came up it was scorched, and because it did not have a root, it withered. 7 Other seed fell into the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it did not produce grain. 8 Butother seed fell on good soil and produced grain, sprouting and growing, some bore thirty times, some sixty and some a hundred times.” 9 And he said, “Whoever has ears to hear, listen!” 10 Whenhe was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 Hesaid to them, “The mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those outside, everything is in parables, 12 ‘*so that when they look, they may look but not see, and when they hear, they may hear but not understand, so they may not repent and be forgiven.’”

13 *He said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? Then how will you understand any parable? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: wheneverthey hear, immediately Satan comes and snatches the word that was sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on the rocky ground: whenever they hear the word, they receive it at once with joy. 17 But they have no root in themselves and are temporary. Then, when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they fall away immediately. 18 Othersare the ones sown among the thorns: they hear the word, 19 but the cares of life, the deceit of wealth and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it produces nothing. 20 And these are the ones sown on good soil: they hear the word and receive it and are productive, one thirty times, one sixty, and one a hundred”* ([Mark 4:1-20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It should be said at the outset that the relevance of this text to our text in [John 15](javascript:%7b%7d) is somewhat dependent upon the conclusion that the first three soils represent those who are not saved, and that only the fourth soil represents genuine believers. If this is the case, then the ultimate proof of one’s faith[46](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4102_1629882) appears to be the bearing of fruit. Believers do not all produce the same quantity of fruit, but they do all produce some fruit. Each of the other three soils fails to produce any fruit. Notice, too, that one might assume for a time that the seed sown in the second and third soils has produced true believers. The first soil rejects the gospel immediately, but the second and third soils appear to have life for a time. It is not until persecution and hard times come that they fall away. These seeds sprout, and they appear to be lively, but they ultimately fail to produce any fruit.

The *fourth* and most compelling text comes from the pen of the Apostle Paul: *13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Seeing that I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I could provoke my people to jealousy and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the first portion of the dough offered is holy, then the whole batch is holy, and if the root is holy, so too are the branches. 17 Now* ***if some of the branches were broken off****, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among them and participated in the richness of the olive root, 18 do not boast over the branches. But if you boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 Then you will say, “The branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” 20 Granted.* ***They were broken off because of their unbelief****, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but fear. 21 For if* ***God did not spare the natural branches****, perhaps he will not spare you. 22 Notice, therefore, the kindness and harshness of God: harshness toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And even they—if they do not continue in their unbelief—will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree?* ([Romans 11:13-24](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Jewish branches were removed from the olive tree because of their unbelief, even as Gentile branches are grafted into the tree by faith. Surely Paul refers here to the very thing that our Lord is speaking about in [John 15](javascript:%7b%7d). Those Jewish branches which falsely assume they will inherit God’s blessings through Israel (“**the olive tree**” here, according to their way of thinking) will be severed from the “**tree**,” Jesus Christ, because they do not believe in Him, and thus they do not abide in Him or bear fruit through Him.[47](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4106_1632722)

I believe these New Testament texts give us a great deal of help in interpreting and applying our Lord’s words in [John 15:2](javascript:%7b%7d). The Jews of His day (not to mention our own) believe they are in “**the vine**.” They suppose that by being descendants of Abraham they have a relationship with God which will gain them an entrance to the Kingdom of God, and which assures them that they will not face eternal judgment. Paraphrased according to my understanding of verse 2, our Lord’s words would be something like this:

*I know that many of the Jews think they already have a living relationship with “the vine.” That is to say they suppose that just because they are Jews physically they are in fellowship with God and therefore eternally secure. I must say that this is not the case. In truth, anyone who trusts in anything or anyone but Me—the way, the truth, and the life—is not saved at all. Those who are truly “in Me” are those who enjoy a union with Me by faith, and who thus bear fruit in Me. Those who do not bear fruit in Me will sooner or later be severed from any relation to Me, and will ultimately face the fire of God’s eternal wrath.*

Having come to this conclusion, let me call your attention to several things I believe we are meant to learn from these first three verses of chapter 15.

*First, notice that the purpose of the vine is to bear fruit.* We know from the Synoptic Gospels that our Lord cursed the unfruitful fig tree ([Matthew 21:18-19](javascript:%7b%7d)). Our purpose as Christians is to abide in Christ so that we might bear fruit. Just what is the “**fruit**” which is either absent or present? What is the difference between a “fruitful” branch and an “unfruitful” branch? Some think that the “**fruit**” our Lord refers to here is the “**fruit of the Spirit**” (see [Galatians 5:22-23](javascript:%7b%7d)). Others think of the “**fruit**” as new converts—those who have been saved as a result of the witness of the branches. I understand the term fruit a bit more broadly. *I believe that as we abide in Christ, He abides in us, and when He abides in us, Jesus Christ becomes evident in and through us.* The “**fruit**” then, is being Christ-like. The church is the body of Christ (see [1 Corinthians 12:27](javascript:%7b%7d); [Ephesians 4:12](javascript:%7b%7d)). I believe we bear fruit as Christ is manifested in and through our lives. He is seen in us as we manifest His character ([Galatians 5:22-23](javascript:%7b%7d)). He is evident in us as we carry on the work He began when He was on this earth (see [Acts 3:6, 12](javascript:%7b%7d)-16; 4:13). *Being fruitful, then, is manifesting Christ in our lives.*

*Second, the branches are the instrument through which fruit is produced.* While our Lord produced much “**fruit**” when He was physically on the earth, He now produces “**fruit**” through those (branches) who believe in Him.

*Third, these branches only bear fruit in union with the vine.* The branches obtain life through the vine; they are sustained by the vine; they produce fruit through the vine. The only way to bear fruit is for the branches to abide in the vine.

*Fourth, the Father is the gardener, who tends the vine.* He removes the lifeless, fruitless branches—those branches which were never truly “in the vine,” but only supposed themselves to be. He “**cleanses**” (some versions render this “**prunes**”) the branches, so that they will bear even more fruit. We really need to pause here for a moment, to reflect on what these words of our Lord really mean. There is a way in which Christians can very quickly and easily turn things around, losing the emphasis and focus we should have. For example, we think of the Lord’s return, and rather than seeing this as the time when our Lord will prevail over His foes and receive the glory He deserves, we think of it mainly in terms of the cessation of our suffering and pain, and in terms of the benefits we will gain.

When our pleasure becomes paramount, rather than God’s glory, then we have fallen far short of what God’s Word teaches. Our purpose in life is not to “fill our cups” with all the pleasure we can experience; it is to abide in Christ so that we may bear fruit for Him. The process by which this fruit-bearing is promoted is often painful. Thus, the Father cleanses or prunes us, so that we will be more fruitful. And lest you think the Father is being arbitrary, do not forget that the “**fruit**” which our Lord produced by His life and sacrificial death at Calvary came at great cost to Him, and to the Father.

*Fifth, the Word is the instrument which the Father employs to tend the vine.* The Word is the instrument which God employs to cleanse the branches (15:3; cf. also 17:17). Put in different terms, the Word is the super-sharp cutting instrument by which God prunes us (see [Hebrews 4:12](javascript:%7b%7d)). Further, it is also my opinion that the Word is often the “cutting instrument” which the Father employs to “remove” the unfruitful (and unbelieving) branches (15:2). As I read through the Book of Acts, I see the closing of a chapter for Israel and the Jews.[48](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4116_1638452) The gospel is proclaimed, and some Jews receive it. But many are those who reject the Word of God, bitterly opposing Paul and others who proclaim it. It is in response to the proclamation of the Word that some are “cleansed” and others are “clipped off.” The Word of God is at one and the same time the instrument which separates some from the vine, while drawing others all the more closely.

### Exhortation and Explanation (15:4-8)

*4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch, and dries up, and they gather them up and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is honored by this, that you bear much fruit and show that you are my disciples.*

The teaching of our Lord concerning “abiding” in Him is based upon a fundamental premise, stated in verses 4 and 5: “**Apart from Me, you can accomplish nothing**.” This is a very basic biblical principle. Jesus means us to understand that the term “**nothing**” refers to spiritual fruit. There is a certain sense in which men can do nothing at all without Christ. They cannot live or breath or eat, apart from the provisions God has made: *24 “The God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives life and breath and everything to everyone. 26 From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live, 27 so that they would search for God and perhaps grope around for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28* ***For in him we live and move about and exist****, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring’*” ([Acts 17:24-28](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Here, our Lord is quite clearly saying that we cannot bear spiritual fruit apart from abiding in Him.

In and of ourselves, we can do nothing to earn God’s favor or to merit His salvation. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God ([Romans 3:23](javascript:%7b%7d)). We are all under divine condemnation, helpless and hopeless, apart from Christ ([Ephesians 2:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)). So, too, apart from abiding in Christ, Christians cannot do anything that will please Him. This is the point of [Romans 7](javascript:%7b%7d). [Romans 6](javascript:%7b%7d) teaches us the necessity of dying to sin and of living righteously, but [Romans 7](javascript:%7b%7d) informs us of the impossibility of doing so in the power of our flesh. And so Paul cries out, “**Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?**” ([Romans 7:24](javascript:%7b%7d)). It is only through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are enabled to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law ([Romans 8:3-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In theory, Christians know the truth that our Lord is emphasizing here, but very often we simply don’t believe it in a practical way. We really don’t believe that apart from Him we can do nothing. The message that we constantly hear from the “human potential” advocates and motivational speakers is that “we have much more power within us than we know, and that by digging deep within ourselves and drawing upon our own hidden strengths, we can do great things.” This is not what our Lord teaches us concerning the bearing of spiritual fruit. *He instructs us that we can do “****nothing****” apart from a vital union with Him, in which we constantly draw from His life, His strength, His truth.* When we do “**abide**” in Christ, we bear much fruit (verses 5, 8), we bring glory to the Father (verse 8), and we prove ourselves to be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ (verse 8).

Abiding in Christ is fundamental and essential. But just what does it mean to *abide* in Him? Our understanding of this great text depends upon our understanding of the word “**abide**” (KJV) or “**remain**.” The NET Bible has chosen to consistently render the Greek term (menw) “**remain**” in our passage.[49](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4126_1642844) The difficulty with the Greek term is that it conveys more than any one English word is able to capture. Let me illustrate this by pointing out the various ways this word is rendered by the translators of the King James Version. Out of 120 occurrences in the New Testament, menw is rendered “**abide**” 61 times, “**remain**” 16 times, “**dwell**” 15 times, “**continue**” 11 times, “**tarry**” 9 times, “**endure**” 3 times, and still in other ways 5 more times. In our text, the idea of “remaining” is clearly present, but the word “**remain**” somehow fails to convey the full force of our Lord’s words. A number of times in John’s Gospel, the term is used of “dwelling” in a certain place, of staying somewhere as one’s dwelling place: *38 Jesus turned around and saw them following and said to them, “What do you want?” So they said to him, “Rabbi” (which is translated Teacher), “where are you* ***staying****?” 39 Jesus answered, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was* ***staying****, and they* ***stayed*** *with him that day. Now it was about four o’clock in the afternoon* ([John 1:38-39](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples, and they ***stayed*** there a few days ([John 2:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

So when the Samaritans came to him, they started asking him to stay with them. He ***stayed*** there two days ([John 4:40](javascript:%7b%7d), see also 8:35; 10:40; 11:6).

In addition to these instances, where menw speaks of one’s dwelling somewhere as a place of residence (even if only for a day or so), there are the two occurrences of the related term (monh) in [John 14:1](javascript:%7b%7d) and 23, which refer to the “rooms” (sometimes rendered “**mansions**”) or “**dwelling places**” that await us in heaven, in the Father’s house. Because of John’s use of these terms, I would suggest that we render the term menw “make one’s home” or “make one’s abode.” *To “****abide****” in Christ as the True Vine is to “make our home” in Him, just as He also “makes His abode” in us.* If we wish to stress the “**remain**” aspect of the term, we might translate menw “to make our permanent home.”

The idea of having God as our “**dwelling place**” is found as well in the Old Testament: *A Prayer of Moses the man of God. LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations* ([Psalm 90:1](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV, emphasis mine).

*1 He who* ***dwells*** *in the secret place of the Most High Shall* ***abide*** *under the shadow of the Almighty. … 9 Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your* ***dwelling place****, 10 No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your* ***dwelling*** ([Psalm 91:1, 9](javascript:%7b%7d)-10, NKJV, emphasis mine).

*For You have been a* ***shelter*** *for me, A* ***strong tower*** *from the enemy* ([Psalm 61:3](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV, emphasis mine).

*The name of the LORD is a* ***strong tower****; The righteous run to it and are safe* ([Proverbs 18:10](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV, emphasis mine).

Consequently, it would seem that “making your permanent dwelling place” is not far from the meaning of menw in our text. This helps us discern the message that our Lord is seeking to convey to His disciples, and ultimately to us. What, then, does it mean to “make the Lord Jesus our permanent dwelling place”? Let’s simplify this definition, and say that Jesus is instructing us to make Him our “home” as He makes His “home” in us. Think about what “home” means to us:

* Home is where your heart is; it is where you want to be (especially during holidays).
* Home is the place to which you return, the place to which you are eager to get back to (e.g., when you’ve been on vacation).
* Home is where you feel comfortable, and can really be yourself.
* Home is a place of safety and security.
* Home is where you bring your friends when you wish to have fellowship with them.
* Home is our base of operations; it is at the center of what we do.
* Home is where you find your strength for life; it is where you eat and sleep.
* Home is where the people and the things we love the most are found.

Isn’t this what Jesus Christ should be for the Christian? Shouldn’t He be our place of refuge and security? Should He not be the source of our life and strength? Shouldn’t He be the reason for our fellowship with others? Shouldn’t He be where our heart is?

To further explore this matter of Jesus Christ as our “abiding place,” our “home,” let us consider the opposite of making Him our home. What is it that should not be our “home”? Answer: this world. The old song goes, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through …” Isn’t that really true? John warns us not to become too attached to the world, not to love it: 15 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; 16 because all that is in the world (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogance produced by material possessions) is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away with all its desires, but the person who does the will of God remains forever* ([1 John 2:15-17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Isaiah had it right, and so did “**righteous Lot**”: *So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts”* ([Isaiah 6:5](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV).

7 … and delivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked. 8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds) ([2 Peter 2:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV).

This is why Christians are not to be “at home” in this world, but to find their home in Christ: *11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation* ([1 Peter 2:11-12](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV).

4 *For indeed we groan while we are in this tent, since we are weighed down, because we do not want to be unclothed, but clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment. 6 Therefore we are always full of courage, and we know that as long as we are alive here on earth we are absent from the Lord— 7 for we live by faith, not by sight. 8 Thus we are full of courage and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So then whether we are alive or away, we make it our ambition to please him* ([2 Corinthians 5:4-9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Allow me to attempt to sum up the meaning of the word “**remain**” in our text. Jesus Christ is the “abiding place” for the Christian. He is the One from whom we derive spiritual life and strength and the means to become Christ-like. It is only through Him that we can “**bear fruit**.” It is by “abiding” in Him that we also enter into the deepest union and fellowship. Thus, Jesus urges His disciples to “**abide**” in Him when He departs to be with the Father, assuring them that He will likewise “**abide**” in them.[50](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4155_1649893)

### Further Instruction on Abiding (15:9-17)

*9 Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete. 12 My commandment is this—to love one another just as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this—that one lays down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because the slave does not understand what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have revealed to you everything I heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that remains, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you. 17 This I command you—to love one another.*

A good teacher employs repetition to clarify and to emphasize his content. In verses 9-17, Jesus reiterates and further explains what He has just said concerning abiding in Him in verses 1-8. He now gives us some specifics as to *how* we are to abide in Him. He also spells out some of the benefits of abiding in Him. Let me summarize our Lord’s teaching by setting down several principles.

**PRINCIPLE ONE: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE ABIDE IN HIS LOVE**. You will remember that John introduces the Upper Room Discourse in chapter 13 with a reference to our Lord’s love for His disciples: *Just before the Passover feast, Jesus knew that his time had come to depart from this world to the Father. He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the very end* ([John 13:1](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus now speaks of abiding in Him as abiding in His *love*. Our Lord’s love for His disciples is like the Father’s love for Him. As our Lord speaks, He is virtually standing in the shadow of the cross. How can He speak of the Father’s love for Him at a time like this? Usually, we tend to emphasize the Father’s love for us, and that this love prompted Him to send His Son to the cross (see [Ephesians 2:4](javascript:%7b%7d)). I believe we must also recognize that the Father sent the Son to Calvary ***out of His love for the Son***, as well as out of His love for lost sinners. How can this be? Dying on the cross of Calvary was indeed an act of humility on our Lord’s part (see [Philippians 2:5-8](javascript:%7b%7d)), but it was also intended for His greater exaltation: *9 As a result [of His death on Calvary, as described in the previous verses] God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord* ([Philippians 2:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

18 *He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead so that he himself may become first in all things. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him 20 and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross—whether things on the earth or things in heaven* ([Colossians 1:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Ephesians 1:18-23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It is my understanding and conviction that the Father purposed our Lord’s suffering for His own glory, as well as to bring glory to the Son. So, too, God purposes our suffering for His glory, but also for our good. And so it is that our Lord’s love for us includes our suffering (see [John 15:18](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.), just as the Father’s love for the Son included His suffering. Abiding in Christ involves “cleansing” or pruning, which is painful for us at the time, but which causes us to cling to the vine, and thus to bear more fruit, and this increased fruit is for His glory, as well as our good.

One more thing should be said about abiding in His love. Abiding in His love is not automatic; it is something which we are commanded to do, and which takes effort and action on our part (albeit, inspired and empowered by God—see [Philippians 2:12-13](javascript:%7b%7d)). Abiding in Christ requires the self-discipline that Paul talks about ([1 Corinthians 9:24-27](javascript:%7b%7d)) and which the Holy Spirit produces (see [1 Timothy 1:7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**PRINCIPLE TWO: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS**. How, then, do we abide in His love? Jesus is very clear on this matter. We abide in His love when we *keep His commandments*. We are to keep His commandments just as He has kept His Father’s commandments, thus abiding in His love (verse 10). Just what commandments would these be that our Lord has kept? John certainly indicates what some of these are: *Then Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak just what the Father taught me”* ([John 8:28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*17 “This is why the Father loves me—because I lay down my life, so that I may take it back again. 18 No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it back again. This is the commandment I received from my Father”* ([John 10:17-18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*49 “For I have not spoken from my own authority, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. Thus the things I say, I say just as the Father has told me”* ([John 12:49-50](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus never acted independently of the Father, even when Satan sought to tempt our Lord to do so in His testing in the wilderness ([Matthew 4:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 4:1-12](javascript:%7b%7d)). He spoke only what the Father gave Him to speak. He even went to the cross of Calvary, in obedience to the commandment He received from the Father. Do you remember the expression, “Your wish is my command?” The Father’s wish (will) was our Lord’s command. That is the way one truly submits.

We often flatter ourselves here, telling ourselves that Jesus died on the cross of Calvary because He loved us so much. There is a certain amount of truth in this, but we often carry it too far. I often cringe when I happen to be listening to a Christian radio station, and I hear these words, “Could it be that He would really rather die than live without us?” Let’s not flatter ourselves. God’s love for the lost did prompt Him to send His precious and sinless Son to the cross of Calvary, but let us not lose sight of the fact that Jesus went to that cross in obedience to the command of the Father.

Our Lord does not say that we abide in His love “if we keep His *commandment* (singular),” but rather if we “**keep His *commandments***” (plural). Here, Jesus does not say that we abide in His love when we “keep the law.” So long as the term “**law**” is properly defined, one might say this. Paul said that the “**law**” was holy, righteous, and good ([Romans 7:12](javascript:%7b%7d)). He called the law “**spiritual**” ([Romans 7:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). And in the next chapter of Romans, Paul said that those who walk in the Spirit will “**fulfill the requirements of the law**” ([Romans 8:4](javascript:%7b%7d)). I believe that our Lord avoided the term “**law**” here and employed the word “**commandments**” because He did not want to give legalistic Judaisers an occasion to attempt to put the Gentiles under the Old Testament law.

The Judaisers separated the law from love,[51](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4175_1657578) though they should not have done so: *“Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who* ***love Him*** *and* ***keep His commandments****”*[*52*](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4177_1658266)([Deuteronomy 7:9](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV, emphasis mine).

Jesus inseparably joins love and commandment keeping. Jesus summed up the whole law by two commandments, both of which were commands to love: *34 Now when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they assembled together. 35 And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: 36 “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37 Jesus said to him, “‘****Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind****.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is like it, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments”* ([Matthew 22:34-40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Judaisers seemed to be ignorant of the fact that the law was given out of love. God gave Israel the law because of His love for those He had chosen to be His people ([Deuteronomy 7:7, 12](javascript:%7b%7d)-13; 10:14-16). He expected His people to obey His law out of their love for Him ([Deuteronomy 7:9; 30:16](javascript:%7b%7d)). Whenever we separate God’s love from God’s law, we get ourselves into trouble.

God gave the law out of His great love for His people. What God prohibited, He prohibited for man’s own good. What He required, He required for man’s own good. The law is a manifestation of God’s love for His people.[53](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4182_1659736) No wonder the psalmists can say these things about God’s law:

*1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night (*[*Psalm 1:1-2*](javascript:%7b%7d)*, NKJV).*

*7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes (*[*Psalm 19:7-8*](javascript:%7b%7d)*, NKJV).*

*I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart (*[*Psalm 40:8*](javascript:%7b%7d)*, NKJV).*

*Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law (*[*Psalm 119:18*](javascript:%7b%7d)*, NKJV).*

*Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; For Your law is my delight (*[*Psalm 119:77*](javascript:%7b%7d)*, NKJV).*

*Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day (*[*Psalm 119:97*](javascript:%7b%7d)*, NKJV).*

*98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts (*[*Psalm 119:98-100*](javascript:%7b%7d)*, NKJV).*

The law of God should be the delight of every saint because it is a manifestation of God’s love. God gave us His law to keep us from those things which would destroy us and to point us to the only One who can save us—Jesus Christ. Whenever we begin to look upon God’s commands as something other than an expression of God’s love, then we are headed for serious trouble.

For example, consider the account of the fall of man in [Genesis 3](javascript:%7b%7d). When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, He gave them a good work to do, and also many good things to eat. The only thing He prohibited was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ([Genesis 2:16-17](javascript:%7b%7d)). Deceitfully, Satan questioned Eve in such a way as to cause her to question God’s love for her. The serpent convinced Eve that God had not prohibited eating from this tree out of love (which, indeed, He had), but out of some less-than-noble motivation. Satan convinced Eve that God was withholding something good, and that she would have to disobey God’s commandment in order to obtain what was “**good**” for her. Had she trusted in God and believed that He forbade the illicit fruit for her good, she would not have desired to eat of that fruit.

It is quite easy for us to see the truth as it applies to Adam and Eve, so long ago and so far away. But let us pause for just a moment to consider a present day example.

As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak. Rather, let them be in submission, as in fact the law says. 35 If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. 36 Did the word of God begin with you, or did it come to you alone? 37 If anyone considers himself a prophet or spiritual person, he should acknowledge that what I write to you is the Lord’s command. 38 If someone does not recognize this, he is not recognized ([1 Corinthians 14:33](javascript:%7b%7d)b-38).

Not just in this passage, but in other New Testament texts as well, Paul calls for men and women to function differently in the church, particularly in its gathering for teaching and worship. Paul instructs the women to be “**silent in the churches**.” He then indicates that this is part of the submission of women which the law requires. And then he goes so far as to insist that his instruction is the “**command**” of our Lord. Why is it that a distressingly large number of evangelical Christians cannot accept this prohibition in the same way that Adam and Eve should have accepted the prohibition of the forbidden fruit? Why is there the assumption that a loving God would not, and could not, restrict the public ministry of women? Why is it that students and scholars are rushing back to their texts, trying to find some loophole which will allow them to set this command of our Lord aside? This prohibition is one of our Lord’s commands, and we should look upon it as a manifestation of His love. And if we are to truly abide in His love, then we must keep this command, as well as all the other commandments of our Lord.

18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 **teaching them to obey *everything* I have commanded you**. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” ([Matthew 28:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

**PRINCIPLE THREE: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE LOVE THE BRETHREN**. While the words of our Lord make it clear that we are to keep all of His commandments (verse 9), at this moment Jesus gives His disciples but one commandment: they must love one another, just as He has loved them (verse 12). In some ways, this one command encompasses all other commands in that if one acts in love toward others, he will keep the commandments. This command has already been given by our Lord: 34 *“I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another”* ([John 13:34-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In chapter 13 and in our text in chapter 15, Jesus is commanding His disciples to love each other. The command does not appear to encompass the world at large, but their relationships with one another as His disciples. As the world witnesses this love, they will see that its origin is divine, and that these men really are the disciples of Jesus. Very shortly, Jesus is going to reveal to His disciples that the world will hate them because they love Him. No wonder it is vital for these men to love one another. It is apparent that these men have not always been of one mind. This very night these men were arguing with one another over which of them was considered the greatest (see [Luke 22:24](javascript:%7b%7d)). In our Lord’s absence, the potential for division was increased. The Holy Spirit would give them a supernatural unity in Christ, but they must strive to maintain this unity by living in love.

**PRINCIPLE FOUR: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE HAVE GREAT JOY (verse 11)**. Leon Morris calls our attention to the fact that the word “**joy**” occurs only once before the Upper Room Discourse, but it will now occur seven times.[54](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4200_1666558) Obviously, “**joy**” is a prominent theme in our text, at a time when we might not expect it. Hearts were heavy that evening, for Jesus had told them some very distressing things, which troubled them greatly (13:22; 14:1, 27; 16:6, 22). If His disciples would abide in Him, their sorrows would be dispelled, and they would be replaced by great joy. Not only would His joy be in them, but their joy would be full. Their hearts would overflow with joy. When we read through the Book of Acts, we find joyful believers, very often in the midst of adversity (see [Acts 2:28; 8:5-8; 13:52; 15:3; 20:24](javascript:%7b%7d)).[55](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4201_1667389)

What is it that will give the disciples—and us—great joy? The first thing I would say is that the “joy” one experiences as an unbeliever is very different from the “**joy**” of the Christian. In fact, the “**joy**” we experience as Christians is almost the opposite of the joy we once experienced apart from Christ. Unfortunately, Jonah illustrates the wrong kind of joy. He could rejoice in his own personal comfort, thanks to the vine that afforded him some shade (4:6), but he was greatly distressed by the salvation of the people of Nineveh ([Jonah 4:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Our joy is very different …

*First and foremost, our joy is really His joy* ([John 15:11; 17:13](javascript:%7b%7d)). As we abide in Him and He in us, we experience great joy from those things that bring Him joy, as we would also be grieved by what grieves Him.[56](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4205_1668214)

*Second, the disciples had a very special joy.* As they were greatly grieved at the death of their Master, their joy at seeing Him alive, raised from the dead, can hardly be described (see [John 16:22; 20:20; 21:7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Third, joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit* ([Acts 13:42](javascript:%7b%7d); [Romans 14:17](javascript:%7b%7d); [Galatians 5:22](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Thessalonians 1:6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Fourth, we have joy when we become born-again Christians by faith in Jesus Christ* ([Acts 8:5-8](javascript:%7b%7d); [Romans 15:13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Fifth, we rejoice when others come to faith in Christ, as well as when they grow in their faith* ([Acts 11:23; 15:13](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Corinthians 7:13](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 3:9](javascript:%7b%7d); [Philemon 1:7](javascript:%7b%7d); [Hebrews 13:17](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 John 1:4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Sixth, we have joy in taking part in the plans and purposes of a sovereign God, even when this brings about our own suffering* ([Acts 4:23-31](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Seventh, we find joy in doing that which brings the Father’s approval* ([Hebrews 12:2](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Eighth, we have joy in sacrificial service* ([2 Corinthians 8:2](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Ninth, we have joy in being with other saints and enjoying their fellowship* ([Philippians 1:3-4](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Thessalonians 2:19](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Timothy 1:4](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 John 1:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Tenth, we have joy when we ask God for what He desires and for what we need, and in seeing Him answer our prayers* ([John 16:24](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**PRINCIPLE FIVE: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE ARE HIS FRIENDS**. Jesus tells His disciples that He no longer calls them slaves, but rather friends. Nevertheless, in the Epistles, the apostles call themselves “**slaves**” of Christ (see [Romans 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Corinthians 4:5](javascript:%7b%7d); [Galatians 1:10](javascript:%7b%7d); [Philippians 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [Colossians 4:12](javascript:%7b%7d); [Titus 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [James 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Peter 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [Jude 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). They also urge others to think of themselves in this way ([Ephesians 6:6](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Peter 2:16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Nevertheless, Jesus speaks of a change which is about to take place in His relationship with His disciples. He will no longer deal with them as His slaves but rather as His intimate friends. A slave is expected to do what his master instructs him to do, whether or not he likes it, and whether or not he understands why he is commanded to do it. The best analogy today would be found in the armed forces. The change would be from the status of a “private” in the army to a “pal” of the sergeant. When new recruits are sent to boot camp, it is to train them to be “slaves.” That is, it is to train these men to obey orders, instantly, and without question. If the sergeant orders a private to dig a hole four feet square, the private is to do it. If the sergeant then orders the private to fill the hole back in again, he is to obey without hesitation. The “private” is virtually the “sergeant’s” slave (at least that’s how it used to be). The private would never think of expecting the sergeant to explain his reasons for giving any order.

Up till now, there was a sense in which the disciples were more like slaves than friends. It was not because Jesus was treating them unkindly, but because they were incapable of being anything else. A “friend” is one with whom you share your thinking, your goals, your motivations, your reasons for doing things. The disciples were simply not able to understand any of these things, even though our Lord communicated many of them to His disciples. But now, with the coming of the Holy Spirit and their abiding in Him, He could openly disclose His plans and purposes, so that they knew not only what He was seeking to do, but how and why He was doing it. No longer were His disciples to be “in the dark”; they were to be fully enlightened as to what He was doing. Abiding in Christ intimately connects us with Christ, so that we not only draw life and strength from Him, but we also come to know His heart and mind.

We see hints of this kind of friendship with God in the Old Testament.[57](https://bible.org/seriespage/34-abiding-christ-john-151-17#P4219_1672001) God called Abraham “**My friend**” in [Isaiah 41:8](javascript:%7b%7d). When He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He would not keep this from His “**friend**”: *17 And the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, 18 since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?”* ([Genesis 18:17-18](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV; see [Isaiah 41:8](javascript:%7b%7d).)

The same kind of intimacy can be seen with Moses:

*9 And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. 10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door. 11* ***So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend****. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle. 12 Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people.’ But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.’ 13 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.” 14 And He said, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest”* ([Exodus 33:9-14](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV, emphasis mine).

I would ask you to take note of the fact that both Abraham and Moses are called the friend of God. In both cases, God reveals things to His “**friend**” that He does not reveal to others. And in both cases, on the basis of what God did reveal to His “**friend**,” this “**friend**” petitioned God on behalf of others, and the petition was granted.

Throughout the Gospels, we are told that the disciples did not know or did not understand much of what Jesus was here to do. They misunderstood and misapplied much of what He did tell them. But after His death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, things became clear to the disciples. And since the apostles wrote the New Testament Gospels and Epistles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have passed on to us what they learned. And so from the time of Pentecost onward, any saint can be an informed “friend” of our Lord, knowing what He is doing, and why, through His Word.

Think of someone you know of who is powerful and influential, and who is sought after by many. Can you imagine what it would be like to know that person intimately, to spend time with this one, and to be able to speak freely about the most confidential matters? *This is the relationship which our Lord not only makes possible for us, it is a relationship He urges us to enter into, and in which we are to abide.*

### Conclusion

One’s last words must be assumed to be significant. Prominent among our Lord’s last words to His disciples was the command to abide in Him. It is the key to fruitfulness, but it is much more than that. It is as essential to our spiritual lives as eating or breathing is to sustaining physical life. As I was reflecting on what it meant to abide in Christ, my attention turned to the words of our Lord in [John 14:6](javascript:%7b%7d), where He claimed to be “**the way, the truth, and the life**.” No born-again Christian would think of denying the truth of these words, but some are inclined to restrict and limit them to the time when people come to faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and for the gift of eternal life. Jesus is “**the way**” to the Father, but we must continue in that way. Jesus is “**the truth**,” and we must believe in the truth of the gospel in order to be saved. But we must constantly be in “**the truth**” of God’s Word because the world and the devil are constantly dealing in deception and illusions (see [Ephesians 4:17-25](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus is “**the life**,” and we must abide in Him, drawing life from Him daily, for these earthly bodies in which we live are, in Paul’s words, “**bodies of death**” ([Romans 7:24](javascript:%7b%7d)). If there are many texts which instruct us regarding our initial entrance into the faith, there are also many texts like our text in [John 15](javascript:%7b%7d) which instruct us to continue to abide in Christ.

And so I would ask a very simple question of you, my friend, “Are you abiding in Christ?” Have you come to recognize your sin, your need for truth, for life, for a way to God the Father and to His heaven? Have you placed your trust in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of eternal life? In other words, are you a Christian? There are many who suppose themselves to be, based upon family background, church attendance, an occasional prayer offered God-ward. But are you abiding in Christ, looking only to Him for life, for strength, for fruit? Do you have a daily sense of your inadequacy in and of yourself? Do you find that it is only “**in Christ**” that you are assured of eternal life and of spiritual fruit? If you are not abiding, it may be appropriate to ask whether or not you are really “in the vine,” whether or not you are one of God’s chosen people.

If, indeed, you are a true child of God, then you should daily seek to abide in Christ. How is this done? How does one abide in Christ? Jesus has told us in this text. *We abide in His love as we obey His commands. We abide in Christ as we draw near to Him and rely on Him to meet our every need, which we cannot meet ourselves.*

As I conclude this lesson, let me highlight two things which I believe are very detrimental to our obedience to our Lord’s command to abide. *The first is complacency*—the false sense that we are self-sufficient, and thus do not need to draw our life and strength from our Lord. This was the case with those in Laodicea: 14 *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation: 15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth! 17 Because you say, “I am rich and have acquired great wealth, and need nothing,” but do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, 18 take my advice and buy gold from me refined by fire so you can become rich! Buy from me white clothing so you can be clothed and your shameful nakedness will not be exposed, and buy eye salve to put on your eyes so you can see!”* ([Revelation 3:14-17](javascript:%7b%7d))

If we feel self-sufficient, we are greatly deceived, and we need to reassess our total dependence on Christ for our life. When we see that “**apart from Him**” we “**can do nothing**,” then we will be prompted to actively abide in Him.

*Second, we are greatly hindered by the hectic pace of our times.* As I have sought to teach this text over the past two weeks, I have emphasized my own appraisal that Christians today are not abiding because they are working so hard to “achieve” for Christ, rather than to “**abide**” in Christ. We have become preoccupied with programs and activities. We are spending more and more time at church and “in ministry,” but less and less time “with our Lord.” We see Him as the “Giver,” but not the “Gift.” We are intent upon obtaining the “power” that He gives, but we are not as intent on knowing the “person” of God in Christ. Of all the time which you are spending “for Christ,” how much time is spent in the pursuit of Christ? I do not ask this as one who is successful in this area, but as one who sees how badly I have failed here. And my guess is that you are struggling in this same matter.

The words “effective” and “successful” are often found in print in a Christian bookstore. And so it is that we continue to read those books which tell us how to be an “effective” leader or husband or parent. We grab up any book that promises us a successful marriage. I do not think in this day and age (and in this culture) that we are doing a great deal of abiding, but only seeking to achieve. It is my opinion that Christians are doing more and more, but abiding less and less. Perhaps it is time for us to have fewer programs, fewer nights at the church, fewer meetings, with the expressed purpose of giving ourselves to abiding in Christ.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that we should completely do away with church functions and devote ourselves only to “individual” activities with the Lord. I do not think it is possible for a Christian to abide in Christ apart from commitment to and involvement in a local church body (see [Hebrews 10:23-25](javascript:%7b%7d)). But we can be tempted to look to programs to give us what only Christ can give. Christians are so busy that they are running themselves ragged, and when they finally have a moment to sit down quietly with the Word of God, they fall asleep (I speak from experience here).

I have spoken about too much church activity, and I believe it to be true in many cases. But I must also say that many of the families I see that are stressed out and spiritually fatigued are not just consumed with church functions, but with family functions, especially those related to the children. We feel that we must have our kids in little league baseball, in soccer, in music lessons, and a myriad of other activities. Somehow, somewhere, we must stop and say that enough is enough. When was the last evening that you spent together quietly at home as a family? When was the last time you invited your unsaved neighbors over for coffee?

One of my fellow-elders remarked that he agreed with much of what I had said about abiding and over-activity. He also pointed out that busyness is not, in and of itself, an anathema to abiding. He is right, of course. No one was busier than our Lord, and yet He never failed to “**abide**” in His Father’s love. But even here, Jesus was able to abide because He purposefully removed Himself temporarily from these busy activities to spend time alone with His Father. We need to do likewise.

It occurred to me that many of those whom I would call “abiders” in the Gospels were women, not men. We see them described, not so much in terms of their great works for our Lord, but rather in terms of simply being with Him (see [Luke 8:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)). I was thinking about Mary and Martha, as described in Luke chapter 10: 38 *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted with all the preparations she had to make, so she came up to him and said, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work alone? So then tell her to help me.” 41 But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the best part; it will not be taken away from her”* ([Luke 10:38-42](javascript:%7b%7d)).

What was “**the best part**” that Mary chose and that Martha neglected? Was it not simply “abiding” in Christ, sitting at His feet, enjoying Him? Are we not so much more like Martha than Mary? I would simply ask you to take the time to sit down and assess the quality of your abiding, and if your abiding is lacking, to purpose before God to do something about it. We are not commanded to produce fruit, for this is what our Lord does in and through us. We are commanded to “**abide in Christ**,” and thus it would behoove us to have a plan and a process by which we seek to obey His command to abide in Him. After all, isn’t this what we should really want to do anyway? Should we not desire to delight in Him, even as He has chosen to delight in us? May God use this text to stimulate us to actively seek to enhance the quality of our abiding in Him, to His glory, and for our eternal good.

37 D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of* [*John 14-17*](javascript:%7b%7d) (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 90, 91.

38 Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible.

39 It had never occurred to me before that the exhortation of our Lord in [John 13-17](javascript:%7b%7d) is similar to that found in the Book of Hebrews, where the Greek term menw (“**abide**”) is found six times. Just as the writer to the Hebrews seeks to keep them from stumbling when persecution intensifies against them, so our Lord speaks to His disciples in the Upper Room, to keep them from stumbling (16:1) and to encourage, instead, their abiding in Him.

40 The Greek term menw occurs 120 times in the New Testament, nearly half of which (55) appear in one of John’s writings. The term occurs 34 times in the Gospel of John, 20 times in the Johannine epistles (18 times in 1 John, 2 times in 2 John), and 1 time in Revelation.

41 Note the word “**every**,” used twice in this verse, so that “**every**” unfruitful branch is removed, just as “**every**” fruitful branch is cleansed or pruned. I believe that John intended for us to recognize this repetition of “**every**” as significant. The fact that “**every**” branch that does not bear fruit is removed seems to speak of one thing—the eternal destiny of the fruitless. All unbelievers will perish in the lake of fire, away from God’s presence ([Revelation 20:11-15](javascript:%7b%7d)), while “**every**” true branch will go through various cleansings to make it more fruitful. The “**every**” in both instances presses me to conclude that Jesus is contrasting true believers and unbelievers. It is in these two instances that the destiny or experience of each is all-inclusive.

42 In addition to the verses cited below, see [Psalm 80:8, 14](javascript:%7b%7d); [Isaiah 27:2](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.; [Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10-13](javascript:%7b%7d); [Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:8; 19:10-14](javascript:%7b%7d); [Joel 2:22](javascript:%7b%7d); [Zechariah 8:12](javascript:%7b%7d); [Malachi 3:11](javascript:%7b%7d). Rosscup adds, “… the vine had been an emblem of Israel on Maccabean coins as well as on the gate of Herod’s Temple.” James E. Rosscup, *Abiding in Christ: Studies in* [*John 15*](javascript:%7b%7d) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), p. 246.

43 In the context, unbelieving Jews are in focus, but in its broader application “fruitless branches” would include all unbelievers, especially those who falsely suppose themselves to be true believers in God.

44 This word is found 28 times in the New Testament. It is found only once in the Synoptic Gospels. It occurs once in 1 Thessalonians, three times in Hebrews, and the other 21 times it is found in one of John's writings (John, 9 times; 1 John, 2 times; Revelation, 10 times). Carson writes, “The word for ‘true’ (*alethinos*), here and often in John, means ‘real’ or ‘genuine.’ … In some passages this notion of ‘true’ or ‘genuine’ shades off into ‘ultimate’, because the contrast is not simply with what is false but with what is earlier and provisional or anticipatory in the history of God’s gracious self-disclosure.” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 122.

45 The best defense of this interpretation I have seen is that of James E. Rosscup, *Abiding in Christ: Studies in* [*John 15*](javascript:%7b%7d) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 248-249.

46 This is speaking from man’s point of view, as in [Matthew 7:20](javascript:%7b%7d). God knows men’s hearts; we don’t.

47 Hendriksen writes, “In no sense whatever do such passages as 15:2 and 15:6 suggest that there is a falling away from grace, as if those who were once actually saved finally perish. *This allegory plainly teaches that the branches which are taken away and burned represent people who never once bore fruit, not even when they were ‘in’ Christ.* Hence, they never were true believers; and for them the in-the-vine relationship, though close, was merely outward. There is, accordingly, nothing here (in 15:1-11) that clashes in any way with 10:28. … The true believers of chapter 15 are represented by those branches which, abiding forever in the vine, bear fruit, more fruit, much fruit. *These never perish!*” William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-1954), vol. 2, p. 296.

48 We know from [Romans 11](javascript:%7b%7d) that this “hardening of Israel” is not total, but partial; not permanent, but temporary.

49 I much prefer the rendering “reside” which the NET Bible suggests in its footnotes.

50 His “abiding” in us is not exactly the same as our “abiding” in Him. By abiding in Him, we draw life and strength, and thus we bear fruit. As He abides in us, He imparts His life, truth, and strength to us. Thus, Christ is manifested both *to* us and *through* us. He does not draw His strength from us, but imparts it to us. Our abiding is that of dependence; His abiding is the gracious manifestation of His presence and power in and through us.

51 In [Luke 13:10-17](javascript:%7b%7d), we read of our Lord healing the woman who had been bent over double for 18 years. Because she was healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue official was indignant—the law had been broken (by his reckoning). Jesus rebuked the official for not caring about this woman’s affliction, and for not rejoicing in her healing. The official was only concerned about the law; Jesus acted in love, and in so doing, the law was not broken, but fulfilled (cf. [Matthew 5:17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

52 Notice that here, the keeping of the law was spoken of as keeping God’s “**commandments**,” virtually the same words we find on the lips of our Lord in [John 15:10](javascript:%7b%7d).

53 This is a point at which some dispensationalists need to be very careful. In their efforts to contrast “law” and “grace” (the old covenant and the new), they tend to portray the law as being evil, and opposed to grace, when the law was given out of God’s love to point men to the grace they desperately need as sinners, condemned by the law, and which they can obtain only in Christ.

54 “Up till this point the word *joy* has occurred in only one verse in this Gospel (3:29). But in the Upper Room it is used seven times.” Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), vol. 3, p. 521.

55 See also [James 1:2](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Peter 4:13](javascript:%7b%7d).

56 Compare [Romans 12:15](javascript:%7b%7d), which instructs us to enter into the joy of fellow-believers, and also into their sorrows.

57 “We should remember that in the Old Testament we read that Abraham was the friend of God ([Isa. 41:8](javascript:%7b%7d)) and that God did not hide from Abraham what he proposed to do ([Gen. 18:17](javascript:%7b%7d)). Similarly, God spoke to Moses as to a friend ([Exod. 33:11](javascript:%7b%7d)). The disciples had been admitted to a relationship like that. They were not slaves, but friends.” Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John*, vol. 3, p. 525.

# Carson’s defense of “cut off” instead of “lift up” in 15:2

# 15:2. Several popular writers, going back directly or indirectly to A. W. Pink (*Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 3 vols. [Cleveland Bible Truth Depot, 1929] 3. 337), argue that *airō* does not here mean ‘cuts off’ (niv) but ‘lifts up [from the ground]’—*i.e.* the fruitless branches are ‘lifted up’ so that they may gain the exposure to sun that has been denied them, and thereby become abundantly fruitbearing. However, of its twenty-four occurrences in the Fourth Gospel, *airō* might be rendered ‘take’ or ‘lift up’ eight times (5:8–12; 8:59; 10:18, 24), and ‘take away’ or ‘remove’ sixteen times (1:29; 2:16; 11:39, 41, 48; 15:2; 16:22; 17:15; 19:15, 31, 38 [*bis*]; 20:1–2, 13, 15). More importantly, although the verb *by itself* may bear the meaning of ‘lift up’ (*cf.* J. Jeremias, *TDNT*1. 185), yet in the context of viticulture it is not the most natural way to take it. Despite arguments to the contrary, there is no good evidence of which I am aware to confirm that lower stalks of grapevines were seasonally ‘lifted up’ from the ground. Moreover, the sharp contrast of v. 2, on the traditional interpretation, prepares the way for v. 6. This more recent interpretation sounds like an attempt to prevent embarrassment at the thought of branches ‘in me’ being cut off, in contradiction (it is thought) to such passages as 6:37–40. But as the exposition above shows, these fears are unfounded. *Cf.* J. Carl Laney, *BSac* 141, 1989, pp. 55–66, esp. pp. 58–60.[[1]](#footnote-1)

# A Sharp Knife for the Vine Branches

[Charles Haddon Spurgeon](https://www.spurgeon.org/multi_author/charles-haddon-spurgeon/) October 6, 1867  
at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/a-sharp-knife-for-the-vine-branches/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/a-sharp-knife-for-the-vine-branches/%23flipbook/)

##### “Every branch in me that heareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” — John 15:2.

THESE are the words of Jesus. Unto you that believe he is precious; and every word that he speaks is precious for his sake: you will be sure, then, to give every syllable its weight, and to let each word fall upon your soul as coming directly from his lips. These are the words of our Lord Jesus just before his departure from the world. We reckon the words of dying men to be worth storing, and especially of such a matchless man as our Lord and Master. It may be said of him, “ Thou hast kept the best wine until now;” for, in this chapter, and in that which follows, we have some of the choicest, deepest, and richest words that the Master ever uttered. You will endeavour then, to hear him speaking as upon the verge of Gethsemane; you will listen to these sentences as coming to you associated with the groans and bloody sweat of his agony. These are words, moreover, about us, and, therefore, to be received by us with profound attention; the most of us who are here are in Christ, some one way or another; the majority of us profess to be Christians; the text, then, is directed to us. When Jesus speaks about anything, it is weighty, and demands our ear, but when he speaks about ourselves to ourselves, we must give him the heart as well as the ear, and give most earnest heed to the things which he speaks to us, lest by any means we let them slip. We may have to regret one day that we did not listen to his voice in love, for we may have to hear it when we must listen to it, when the tones have become those of judgment, and Jesus the judge shall say unto us, “I know you not,” even though we shall venture to plead that we ate and drank in his presence, and that he taught in our streets.

     Having, then, your solemn attention, we will read the text again: “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.”

     The text suggests self-examination; conveys instruction; and, invites meditation.

    I. In the first place, it SUGGESTS SELF-EXAMINATION.

    I hear in these solemn words the tones of his voice of whom Malachi said, “Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap.” I discern in these two heart-searching sentences, the voice of him of whom John said, “His fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Truly the Lord’s “fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.” Happy shall that man be who can bear to be thrust into the flame, and to be covered with the hot coals of the burning truths here taught: but he shall be found reprobate who cannot bear the trial.

     1. Observe, that our text mentions two characters who are in some respects exceedingly alike; they are both branches, they are both branches in the vine: “Every branch in me.” How much alike persons may be apparently, who in God’s sight stand at opposite poles of character! Both the persons described in the text were in Christ: in Christ in different senses it is plain, because the first persons were not so in Christ as to bring forth fruit, consequently, as fruit is that by which we are to judge a man, they were not in Christ effectually, graciously, influentially, or so as to receive the fruit-creating sap. If they had brought forth fruit, their fruitfulness would have been a sign that they were in Christ savingly. Who will venture to say that a man who yields no fruit of righteousness can be really a Christian? Yet they were in Christ in some sense or other; that is to say, the two characters were equally esteemed to be Christians; their names were enrolled in the same church register; in the common judgment of men they were equally Christian; according to their own profession, they were so; in many other respects which we need not now catalogue, they were both in Christ as his avowed disciples, as soldiers professedly fighting under his banner, as servants wearing his livery.

     These two persons were probably equally sound in their doctrinal views, they held the same precious truth. If they heard falsehood, they were equally earnest to denounce it. When they listened to the gospel, they received it with joy, and so received it as to be willing to assist in the spread of it, and even to make sacrifices for its extension. These persons were equally attentive to ordinances. How often has it happened that two persons of widely different state before the Lord, have been baptised at the same hour, in the same water, into the same name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and have then broken bread together with equal apparent fervency, and with equal professions of enjoyment and devotion! These people have been equally fair in their profession; their moral conduct has in the judgment of all onlookers been much the same; they have avoided every thing of ill repute, and they have in their measure sought after that which was comely and lovely in the estimation of men. Ah! there will often be found two who publicly pray alike, have an equal gift in prayer — and what is worse, preach with equal earnestness and zeal, to all appearance, who have family prayer maintained with the same consistency, and yet for all this, the end of the one shall be to be cast away as a branch to be burned, while the end of the other shall be to bring forth fruit unto perfection, with everlasting life as the reward. Ah! friends, man can counterfeit cleverly, but when the devil helps him, he becomes master of the art. You will see pieces of coinage which it is almost impossible for you to discover to be mere counterfeits by their appearance, or even by their ring; in the scales they almost deceive yon, but you put them into the fire, and then the discovery is made. Doubtless there are thousands in all Christian churches who have the stamp and the impress of the King upon them, and look like the genuine shekels of the sanctuary, who after all are only fit to be like bad money, fastened down on the footstool of the judgment seat, with a nail driven through them, to their everlasting reprobation and disgrace. How can we tell a bold man from a coward? Two soldiers wear the same regimentals: they will talk equally loudly of what they will do when the enemy shall come. It is the battle that tests and proves them; some peculiar phase of the conflict will bring out the difference; but till the battle comes, how easy it is for the poltroon to play the hero, while perhaps the bravest man may modestly shrink into the rear! Our text, then, brings before us two characters apparently alike. The

     2. Then, in the second place, it shows us the distinction between them — the great and solemn difference. The first branch brought forth no fruit; the second branch bore some fruit. “By their fruits ye shall know them.” We have no right to judge of our neighbours’ motives and thoughts, except so far as they may be clearly discoverable by their actions and words. The interior we must leave with God, but the exterior we may judge, and must judge. There is a sense in which we are not to judge men; but there is another sense in which he would be an arrant fool who did not constantly exercise his judgment upon men. “By their fruits ye shall know them,” is our Lord’s own canon of sacred criticism. If you would judge men and judge yourselves, this is the one test— “by their fruits.”

     Now, then, what say you professors who are present here to-day; you who are so regular in your attendance upon the means of grace? Will you now search yourselves, to see whether you have any fruit? That you may be helped in such an investigation, let me remind you that the apostle Paul has given us a list of these fruits, in his fifth chapter of the epistle to the Galatians. He says in the twenty-second verse, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” Nine kinds of fruit: all these should be “in us and abound.” Let us question ourselves whether we have any of them.

     Say, professor, hast thou brought forth the fruit of “love”? Searching question, this! I do not ask thee, canst thou talk of love ? but, dost thou feel it? I do not say, is love upon your tongue ? but, does love rule thy heart? Dost thou love God as a child loves its father? Dost thou love the Saviour from a sense of gratitude to him who bought thee with his blood? Dost thou feel the love of the gracious Comforter, who dwells in thee, if thou be indeed a child of God? What knowest thou about love to the brethren? Dost thou love the saints, as saints, whether they belong to thy church or no; whether they please thee or serve thy turn or no? Say, dost thou love God’s poor? Dost thou love God’s persecuted and despised ones? Answer, I pray thee. What about love to the kingdom of the Lord’s dear Son, and to the souls of men? Canst thou sit still and be satisfied with being saved thyself, while thy neighbours are being damned by thousands? Are thine eyes never wet with tears for impenitent souls? Do the terrors of the Lord never get hold upon thee, when thou thinkest of men plunging themselves into perdition? “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” Hast thou this fruit, then ? for if not, “every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.”

     Next comes joy. Does thy religion ever give thee joy? Is it mere matter of duty, a heavy chain for thee to drag about like a convict, or is thy religion a harp for thee to dance to the tune of? Dost thou ever rejoice in Jesus Christ? Dost thou know what the “joy of the Lord” means? Does it ever give thee joy to think that he is the same even when the fig tree does not blossom, and the herd is cut off from the stall? Dost thou feel a joy in reading the promises of God’s word? Hast thou a joy in secret prayer; that joy which the world never gave thee, and cannot take away from thee? Hast thou a secret joy, like a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, which is only open to thee and thy Lord, because thy fellowship is with him, and not with the sons of sin? He that never mourned because of sin, has never repented; but he who kas never rejoiced because of forgiveness, cannot have seen the cross. Come, then, hast thou produced this fruit of joy? The Lord give it more and more to thee! If thou hast never had it, then hear the sentence — “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.”

     Next follows “peace.” Oh, blessed fruit ! an autumn fruit, mellow and sweet, and fit for an angel’s tooth. It is the fruit the blessed feed upon in heaven — peace with God, peace of conscience, peace with one’s fellow men, “the peace of God which passeth all understanding,” which “keeps the heart and mind through Jesus Christ.” “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ah! my hearers, some of you make a great deal of noise perhaps about religion, and yet never have peace of conscience. This is what ceremonialists never can obtain. “We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle” of outward ordinances, and carnal, vainglorious, pompous ceremonies. Of our altar, where the finished sacrifice is eaten as a peace offering, they cannot eat. They find no peace after all their masses, and holy offices, and processions, and sacred hours, and priestcraft, and I know not what; poor slaves, they go down to their graves as much in bondage as ever, with the dreary prospect of a purgatorial fire before them: no delightful prospect of waking up in the likeness of Christ; no sense of the truth of that glorious passage, “and ye are complete in him.” He that hath Christ hath this one of his fruits, namely, peace. He who knows no peace with God, has good need to tremble.

     Mention is next made of longsuffering. I fear there are many professors who have very little of this, a quality which may be viewed in many aspects. There is patience, which bears God’s chastising hand, and does not turn against him, but says, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Longsuffering towards God, suffering long. Then there is longsuffering towards man, bearing persecution without apostacy, bearing slander and reproach without revenge, bearing the errors and mistakes of mankind with tender compassion. The believer should have much of this. Some of us, perhaps, may be naturally quick tempered; grace must overcome angry passions. It is not for you to say, “I cannot help it the fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering — you must help it. If there is no change in your temper, there is no change in you at all; you have need to be converted. If the grace of God does not help you in a measure to keep under that temper which will be there, but which you must restrain, you have need to go to God and ask him to make sound work in you, for there is no work of grace there yet. We must have longsuffering, or we may be found fruitless, and then woe unto us.

     Next in order is gentleness, by which I understand kindness. The Christian is a man of kindness. He recognises his kinnedness with his fellow men, he wishes to treat them as his kin. He has compassion for those who are suffering; he endeavours to make his manners kind and courteous. He knows that there is a natural offence in the cross to carnal men, he does not wish therefore to make any offence of his own. He desires in his own life not to be morose, suspicious, harsh, proud domineering, but he seeks to imitate his Master, who said of himself, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” The believer in Christ should be gentle towards all men with whom he comes in contact. This is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and, I may add, a fruit of the Spirit in which many professors are terribly deficient. Do not think that I judge you. I judge you not — there is one that judgeth you, it is this word of God which we speak. Gentleness is the fruit of the Spirit, and if you have it not, you have not this fruit of the Spirit; and what saith the text, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away!”

     We are next reminded of goodness, by which is undoubtedly meant beneficence, benevolence, generosity, not merely kindliness of manner, but bounty of heart. Oh, what a fine thing it is when our Christianity gives us a noble spirit I We cannot all be nobles in pocket, but every child of God should be a noble in his heart. “Come in,” said a poor Scotch woman to some of the Lord’s people, “I have room for ten of you in my house, but I have room for ten thousand of you in my heart.” So should the believer say, “Come in, ye that are in need; I have not the power to help many of you, but I have the will to help all of you if I could.” The Christian should be like his Lord and Master, easily entreated, ready to communicate, making it his delight and his business to distribute, like a cloud that is full of rain, and empties itself upon the earth; like the bright and sparkling sun scattering his beams abroad, and not hiding or hoarding his light. If ye have not this fruit of the Spirit in some measure, I beseech you to remember the solemn words of the text, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.”

     Then comes faith, by which is probably not meant the grace of faith which is rather a root than a fruit, yet that is included. The fruit of the Spirit is indeed faith in God ; without this, there is not even the commencement of anything like security in the soul. Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Hast thou faith? If thou hast faith but as a grain of mustard-seed, it is a sign of life within thee. If thou hast little of it, pray, “Lord, increase our faith!” But the faith here, I think, means faithfulness — faithfulness towards God, faithfulness towards conscience. How little some Christians make of that nowadays! Why, they swallow their consciences. There are ministers who subscribe to words which they know to be deceiving the people, and help to buttress a church which is doing its utmost to lead this nation into downright Popery. The good and gracious ministers in the Establishment are the prop and pillar of it, and by their influence they maintain a system which enables traitors to pollute this land with Popery. O that our friends had a little more tenderness of conscience, and would come out from their unhallowed alliance with the Popish Ritualists. How earnestly do I pray that none of us have the remotest connection with anything which would take us back to that Antichrist which God hateth, which he so hateth, that he has bidden his servant John, call the apostate church by a dreadful name, a brand of infamy, a name which God never uses till he has cast off and utterly abhorred a thing. My brethren, may your consciences be faithful, and may you be faithful to your consciences: men that trifle with doctrine, it seems to me, little know what sins they commit. I tell you who trifle with doctrines, that you are as bad as thieves; you are worse, for the thief only robs men, but you rob God and your own souls. By helping to foster error, you are heaping together the elements of a pestilence which, unless grace prevent, will utterly destroy this land. We must have faithfulness also in our dealings with our fellow men in business. Saints are men of honour still. The Christian man “sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.” He does not take an oath, but bis word is his bond. O that we may have this fruit of the Spirit: faithfulness, directness, straightforwardness, doing the right, loving the true, and walking uprightly before the Lord our God!

     The next fruit is meekness. May we possess much of this, for there is a peculiar benediction promised to the meek: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” The Christian is to be as harmless as a dove. In his Master’s battles, bold as a lion, but for himself and for his own cause, tender, gentle, shunning debate, loving quietness, ready to take a rebuke rather than to administer one; feeling himself to be weak and frail. Moses was the meekest of men, often provoked, but only once speaking unadvisedly with his lips. It is marvellous how he bore with the people; they were the most provoking people in the world, except ourselves — but yet, like as a nurse is tender with a sick child, even so was he with a foolish people. How oft did they provoke him and grieve his spirit! He grew indignant, and dashed the two tables of stone upon the ground, when he saw the idolatry of the people. Moses, the meekest of men, could not bear that; and God’s meekest servants grow wrath when they think of the idolatry into which this land is sliding so rapidly. But meek we must be towards all men; and if we have not this fruit, the Master says, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.”

     Do not forget temperance, which is now generally used in respect to meats and drinks, but which has a far wider signification, though it includes that. The man who indulges the appetites of the flesh, and cannot control himself as to eating and drinking, need not pretend to be a Christian. He has first to prove that he is equal to a beast before he may pretend to be a child of God ; he has first to show that he is a man before he may claim to be a Christian. Those who indulge in drunkenness shall drink of the wine of God’s wrath ere long, and then how bitter will their sweet wines be to them! how will that which has been sweet to the throat, be as poison in the bowels for ever and ever! If we have not that kind of temperance, evidently we can know nothing about true religion. But there must be an equal temperance in all other things, a temperance in your dress, in your expenditure, in your temper, and indeed in every act. There is a moderation to be observed, a narrow road to be followed, which the tutored eye of the spiritual man can see, and which it is a fruit of the Spirit for the spiritual foot to tread. God grant that we may have these fruits.

     Beloved in the Lord, I am persuaded that no truth needs to be pressed more upon my own soul and yours than this, that positive fruit is the only test of our being in Christ. It is so easy for us to wrap ourselves up in the idea that attention to religious ceremonies is the test, but it is not so, for “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees,” who were the most religious people of their day, “ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” I know it is easy to think, “ Well, I do not indulge in drunkenness ; I am no rogue ; I do not do this or that.” This is little to the matter. Remember that the judgment will not be about those things which you do not do, but about positive things. How does Jesus Christ put that judgment matter? “I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: 1was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.” The absence of positive fruit was that which condemned the lost. “Every tree,” says John, “that beareth not fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.” He does not say, “Every tree that bears bitter fruit, or sour grapes,” but “Every tree that bringeth forth no fruit.” Fruitless professors, tremble! I may not speak so as to make this truth penetrate as I would it should into your inmost souls, but I pray the eternal Spirit to make it like fire in the bones of every deceived man and woman. If my Lord shall come to you, my hearer, day after day, as he once came to the fig-tree, and should find leaves upon you and no fruit, I tell you he will say, “Henceforth let no fruit be on thee for ever,” and thou shalt wither away. What is his own parable! The master of the vineyard said to the husbandman, “Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” And when the husbandman interceded, you will remember his intercession was only so far: “If it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” Jesus the intercessor agrees with his Father the Husbandman; Mercy agrees with Justice; if there be no fruit, the tree must come down. May I beseech you to lay these things to heart. Thou must bear fruit unto God by the power of the Spirit, or it is down with thee. God fingers his axe this morning; it is sharp, and if he doth but lift it, woe to thee, barren fig tree! Woe, indeed, to me also, if I be found barren in the day of the Lord’s appearing.

     In closing this weighty business of self-examination, I must remind you that our Lord tells us, that although these persons were in some points alike, the solemn difference between them led to a solemn result. “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” There are many ways in which the Lord takes away barren branches. Some times he allows the professor to apostatise. He gets rich, and then he will not go to the place of worship which he used to frequent when he was a poorer man, and was humble enough to hear the gospel; he must go to some fashionable place, where he can listen to anything but the truth; and thus by his own pride he is taken away. Or else he is allowed to fall into open sin. We always should regret the falls of professors, but sometimes it is possible that discovered sins may be a blessing, for they take away from the church men who never ought to have been there, and who were an injury to it. Many bright professors have stood well for a long time, but at last they have been snuffed out ecclesiastically by reason of their outward sins. God has taken them away. Some have been taken away in a more terrible sense by death; God has removed them. They have lived in the church and died in the church, but have been taken away in solemn judgment, and cast into the fire. Then there is a taking away which is worst of all, when the Master shall say, “Depart, ye cursed!” Now, do observe it: these were respectable people; these were people like you, decent, good people, who attended a place of worship, and contributed, and were very moral, but still they had not grace in their souls. They had nominal Christianity, but not the fruit of the Spirit; and what was done with them? “Lord, cannot some mild means be used ? How sad to see these branches cut off !” “No,” saith he, “if they bring not forth fruit, they must be taken away.” “But, Lord, they never reeled in and out of the gin palace! Lord, they were much too good and much too amiable to be found amongst the debased and the debauched!” “Take them away; they brought no fruit, and they must be taken away.” “But, Master, they were so diligent in the use of ordinances, they were so constant and regular in the form of prayer!” “They brought forth no fruit,” saith he, “take them away.” There is only this one thing for them: if they had through saving faith been made to bear the fruit of the Spirit, they should have been saved; but as there was no fruit, take them away.

     What is done with that which is taken away? If I could take yon just outside the garden wall, I would let you see a heap of weeds and slips that are taken from the vine, and there they are heaped together with a little straw, and the gardener bums them. The other branches with their purple clusters are in honour, but these dishonoured things are burnt outside the gate. I cannot picture to you that day of doom, that fate tremendous which shall come upon fruitless branches of the spiritual vine – outside the gate, with a great gulf fixed between them and heaven, where the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever, “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” If such people are cast away, what will become of some of you? If these good people who were in Christ, in a way, still perish, because they brought forth no fruit, O ye who are like hemlock in the furrows of the field, ye who produce the grapes of Gomorrha and the apples of Sodom, what shall be your doom in the day of account when the Master shall come forth in robes of judgment to execute righteousness among the sons of men?

     II. Briefly on the second point. THE TEXT CONVEYS INSTRUCTION.

     Looking at it carefully, we observe chat the fruit-bearing branches are not perfect If they were perfect, they would not need pruning; but the fact is there is much of original inbred sin remaining in the best of God’s people, so that whenever the sap within them is strong for the production of fruit, there is a tendency for that strength to turn into evil, and instead of good fruit evil is produced. It is the strength of the tree, and the richness of the sap which makes the branch produce too much wood, so that it needs pruning. The gardener desires to see that strength in clusters, but alas! instead it runs into wood. Now, observe that in a Christian when the sap comes into him to produce confidence in God, through the evil that is in him, it often produces confidence in himself, and he who should be strong in faith becomes strong m carnal security. When the sap would produce zeal, how very frequently it turns into rashness, and instead of zeal with knowledge, fanaticism is brought forth! Suppose the sap flows to produce self-examination, very generally unbelief is the outgrowth, and instead of the man doubting himself, he begins to doubt his Lord. How often have I seen even the joy of the Lord turned into pride, and when the man should rejoice in Christ Jesus, he has began to rejoice in himself, to grow proud and say, “What a fine experience I possess!” That love which we ought to bear towards our neighbours, how apt is that to run into love of the world and carnal complacency towards its evil ways! The gentleness which I praised just now, often turns to a silly compliance with everybody’s whim, and meekness which is a fruit of the Spirit, how often that becomes an excuse for holding your tongue, when you ought boldly to speak! The fact is, it is very difficult to keep ourselves, when we are in a flourishing state, from producing wood instead of grapes. God grant us grace to keep us from this evil; and I do not know how the grace can come except by his judicious pruning.

     I say the fruit-bearing branches are not perfect because they bear a great deal that is not fruit, and, moreover, not one of them bears as much fruit as it ought to do. I do not agree with Mr. Wesley’s opinion about perfection. It is very difficult to see how he could have done more than he did, but I do not doubt that even he felt that he might have been more like his Lord. None of the Lord’s people with whom I ever came into communion have dared to think themselves perfect; and if they had said so, and proved it, I should have rejoiced to think that there were such people, but greatly sorrowed to find that I belong to a very different order of beings myself; for “in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.” The Master is bringing us upon our way to bring forth more fruit, but as yet, the fruit-bearing branches are not perfect.

     Hence we are taught, in the second place, that pruning is the lot of all the fruitful saints. You may escape it if you are not fruitful, you will be cut off, you will not be pruned, but all the fruit-bearing saints must feel the knife. Observe Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had not those patriarchs their trials? Moses and David, Jeremiah and Daniel, who among those escaped? Though they honoured their Master much, who escaped without the pruning knife? And if you come to the saints of the New Testament, surely the flame was seven times hotter with regard to them than with regard to the elder brethren. How does the Lord prune his people, then? It is generally said by affliction; I question if that could be proved as it stands; it needs explanation. It is generally thought that our trials and troubles purge us; I am not sure of that, they certainly are lost upon some. Our Lord tells us what it is that prunes us. “Now,” saith he, in the third verse of the chapter, “ye are clean (or pruned) through the word which I have spoken unto you.” It is lice word that prunes the Christian, it is the truth that purges him, the Scripture, made living and powerful by the Holy Spirit, effectually cleanses the Christian. “What then does affliction do?” say you. Well, if I may say so, affliction is the handle of the knife; affliction is the grindstone that sharpens up the word; affliction is the dresser which removes our soft garments, and lays bare the diseased flesh, so that the surgeon’s lancet may get at it; affliction makes us ready to feel the word, but the true pruner is the word in the hand of the Great Husbandman. Sometimes when you lay stretched upon the bed of sickness, you think more upon the word than you did before, that is one great thing. In the next place, you see more the applicability of that word to yourself. In the third place, the Holy Spirit makes you feel more, while you are thus laid aside, the force of the word than you did before. Ask that affliction may be sanctified, beloved, but always remember there is no more tendency in affliction in itself to sanctify us than there is in prosperity; in fact, the natural tendency of affliction is to make us rebel against God, which is quite opposite to sanctification. It is the word coming to us while in affliction that purges us; it is God the Holy Ghost laying home divine truth, and applying the blood of Jesus, and working in all his divine energy in the soul; it is this that prunes us, and affliction is only the handle of the knife, or what if I say the ladder which the gardener takes to reach the vine, so that he may prune it the better! Now, it may be that some of us have been afflicted a great deal, and have not been pruned. I know some people who have been very poor, I do not see that they are any better for it, and I know some others who have been very sick, and I have never heard that they have been improved. Alas! some people are of such a character, that if they were stricken till their whole head ware sick, and their whole heart faint, they would not be benefited; if they were beaten till they were all bruises and putrifying sores, they would still go on to rebel, for these things only provoke them to a greater hatred against the Most High. We must be pruned, but it must be by the word, through affliction.

     Now, the object in this pruning is never condemnatory. God does not purge his children with a view to visit them penally for sin; he chastises, but he cannot punish those for whom Jesus Christ has been already punished. You have no right to say, when a man is afflicted, that it is because he has done wrong; on the contrary, “every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth.” Just the branch that is good for something gets the pruning knife. Do not say of yourselves, or of other people, “That man must have been a great offender, or he would not have met with such a judgment.” Nonsense, who a holier man than Job; but who brought lower than he? Why, the fact is, it is because the Lord loves his people that he chastens them, not because of any anger that he hath towards them. But learn, beloved, especially you under trial, not to see an angry God in your pains or your losses, or your crosses; but instead thereof, see a husbandman, who thinks you a branch whom he estimates at so great a rate, that he will take the trouble to prune you, which he would not do if he had not a kind consideration towards you.

     The real reason is that more fruit may be produced; which I understand to mean more in quantity. A good man, who feels the power of the word pruning him of this and that superfluity, sets to work, in the power of the Holy Ghost, to do more for Jesus. Before he was afflicted he did not know how to be patient. He learns it at last — a hard lesson. Before he was poor he did not know how to be humble, but he learns that. Before the word came with power he did not know how to pray with his fellows, or to speak to sinners, or lay himself out for usefulness; but the more he is pruned, the more he serves his Lord. More fruit in variety too, may be intended. One tree can only produce one kind of fruit usually, but the Lord’s people can produce many, as we have already seen; and the more they are pruned the more they will produce. There will be all kinds of fruits, both new and old, which they will lay up for their beloved. There will be more in quality too. The man may not pray more, but he will pray more earnestly; he may not preach more sermons, but he will preach them more thoroughly from his heart, with a greater unction. It may be that he will not be more in communion with God as to time, but it will be a closer communion; he will throw himself more thoroughly into the divine element of communion, and will become more hearty in all that he does.

     This is the result of the pruning which our heavenly Father gives; and if such be the result, the Lord keep on pruning, for what greater blessing can a man have than to produce much fruit for God? Better to serve God much than to become a prince. He that doeth much for Christ, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. He is glorifying God; he is blessing his fellow men; he is bringing joy into his own spirit. Oh, if on bended knee we might seek but one favour, methinks we would not ask the wisdom which Solomon craved; we would petition for this, that we might bring forth much fruit, that so we might be Christ’s disciples.

     III. To conclude. Our text INVITES MEDITATION.

     I will hint at the points on which it invites our thoughts. It suggests to every unconverted person here this one question. It seems that it is not very easy for the righteous to be saved: “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the wicked appear?” If the branches in Christ that bear no fruit, are taken away, what must become of the Sabbath-breakers, the despisers of God, the atheists, the drunkards, the unchaste, the dishonest, the blasphemers? I raise the question – solve it! Let it burn into your soul!

     Secondly, what a mercy it is to the believer that it is pruning with him and not cutting off! Ah, let the knife be very sharp, let the word throw ns into the great, deeps, till we almost despair; yet, thank God, we are not cast into hell! Dear friends, your prayer should be, “Lord, let thy word cut deep into me. Do not let the preacher mince matters with me. Deliver him from sewing pillows under my armholes, and lulling me to sleep. Lord, I would be faithfully dealt with! I put the proud flesh before thee, cut it out, that the wound heal not so as to be worse when healed than it was when a running sore.” What a mercy it is not to be cut off! Ah, Christian, you are desponding and doubting to-day, while the word is searching you, but you might have been in hell! Think of that. You are poor, or you are full of pain, but you might have been driven from the presence of God. How can you, as a living man, complain, whatever God may place upon you?

     In the next place, it would be well to think how gently the pruning has been done with the most of us up till now, compared with our barrenness. I wonder the Lord has not cut us about much more. He who has a deep-seated disease requires sharp medicine; and when the sore runs deep, the doctor must cut deep too. With all the rust that is on us, I wonder we are not filed more. There is so much alloy, it is marvellous that we are not oftener put into the fire. O Spirit of God, thou hast hard work with some of us, still we bless thee, for thy gentleness hath been manifested very graciously. How tenderly hast thou dealt with our frail dust, O God of love!

     Again, how earnestly we ought to seek for more fruit If this is what God seeks after, we should be after it. If he often goes the length of pruning the vine, although he does not love to do it, for he does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men for nought, let us agree with God, and seek to yield more fruit.

     How concerned should every one of us be to be efficaciously and truly one with Christ! I ought to have said that the whole gist of the text lies in that “in me, in me, in me.” You see, if a man is not in Christ at all, why then, of course, there is no hope of any sort; and then, when he is in Christ, there comes the, question, is he in Christ by living faith, by real trust? has he the faith of God’s elect? has he been born again from above? is he a spiritual grace-taught soul? Let this be the question which shall rest upon our minds. I would that this morning my text might be sweet to you; sweet, I said, because if for the moment it seemeth bitter, the end is sweetness. Faithful are the wounds of such a friend as Jesus. If he has wounded any of you, it is not to drive you from him, but to make you cling the closer to him. Have you never learned that, when you feel the most humbled, most afraid, most full of sin, most conscious of your own imperfection, the best thing is to cling to Christ the more? “Well, Lord, if I have been the most cursed hypocrite that ever lived, I will come to thee now. If up to this moment I have been deceived, and have not had a grain of true faith, nor a single one of the fruits of the Spirit, yet here I am, a poor black sinner, I to the fountain fly; a naked, sinner, I wrap thy righteousness about my loins; a poor sin-sick, lost sinner, I look up to thee on yonder cross, and I do believe that thou canst save me. From the very jaws of death, and out of the belly of hell, do I cry unto thee, and thou wilt hear me. O sinners and saints, come to Christ again, whether you are his experimentally, or are strangers to him, come to him now, for still the gospel-bell rings out sweetly, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” O God, grant us grace to come now afresh, and his be the praise! Amen, and Amen.

# The Analogy of the Vine

### by J. C. Laney at [*https://www.monergism.com/analogy-vine*](https://www.monergism.com/analogy-vine)

Beginning the analogy, Jesus introduces himself as the vine. The definite article (“the”) with the adjective alēthinos (ἀληθινός) indicates that Jesus is the “true” or “genuine” vine. Although Israel was viewed as the vine in numerous Old Testament texts, Jesus is the “true vine” who fulfills God’s expectation for his people. A growing vine needs care and so Jesus identifies God the Father as the farmer or gardener. God is the one who does the planting, watering, and pruning of the vine. As in Isa 5:1–6, the vineyard is under God’s care and sovereign authority.

Jesus goes on in John 15:2 to describe the work of the gardener or vinedresser in relationship to the branches (klēma, κλῆμα) which are attached to the vine. Jesus doesn’t identify the branches with a particular group of his followers, but he does identify two kinds of branches: the fruit bearing and the fruitless.

It is obvious in this analogy that Jesus is speaking about people, not plants. The context suggests Jesus is referring to his disciples, broadly defined as “interested listeners.” A disciple (mathētēs, μαθητής) is one who listens and learns, “a learner.” A disciple would follow his teacher, learning from what he did as well as from what he said.

Jesus is teaching that there are two kinds of disciples—those who “bear fruit” and those who do not. Crucial to an understanding of this text is the fact that not all disciples continue with Jesus. John records that some of Jesus’ disciples turned away from Jesus’ hard teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum: “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (John 6:66 ESV). John’s point is clear: Not all “disciples” are believers. Some listen and learn for a time, but then turn away, rejecting Jesus and his teaching.

Continuing his application of the analogy, Jesus describes two actions that are taken with regard to the branches. The vinedresser “takes away” (airō, αἴρω) the fruitless branches and “prunes” (kathairō, καθαίρω) the fruit bearing branches. The latter verb can also be translated “to cleanse,” “to purge,” or “to purify.” While it was commonly used in contexts of ceremonial cleansing, kathairō is not the normal word for pruning. Its use here can be attributed to the fact that Jesus is talking about people rather than vines.

Regular pruning is absolutely necessary to maximize the fruit production of a vine. The Mishnah refers to the thinning of the grape vines and the removal of branches that have defective clusters (m. Peah 7:4–5). Robin Murto, a grape grower in Yamhill County, Oregon, says, “Pruning is the single most important job you can do in a vineyard. What eventually ends up in a bottle of wine starts right here.” It is a job that must be done carefully to avoid injury to the vine. She adds, “All it takes is one wrong clip to reduce any given vine’s productivity by half.” Dick Shea, another grape grower in Oregon, notes, “Pruning isn’t something that seems to intrigue people, but it is just absolutely critical. It’s integral to the quality of the grapes.”

Drawing insight from a publication by the California Agricultural Extension Service, Rosscup describes several different kinds of pruning. First, there is the pinching with the thumb and finger to remove the growing tip of a vigorous shoot, so that it will not grow too quickly and be broken or damaged by a gust of wind. Second, there is topping, the removal of one or two feet from the end of a growing shoot to prevent a later loss of the entire shoot, which might be snapped off by the wind. Third, thinning involves the removal of grape flowers or clusters, which enables the rest of a branch to bear more and better quality fruit. Fourth, there is the pruning or cutting away of suckers, which rise from below the ground or from the trunk and main branches of the vine. Some of the pruning takes place during the growing season, but the main pruning takes place in the fall or winter when the grower prunes the vine severely to prepare it for the next growing season.

What is the spiritual lesson Jesus is revealing by this analogy? Jesus is teaching the Eleven in the upper room that as the vinedresser cuts away and removes that which would hinder the productivity of the vine, so God the Father, through loving discipline, removes things from the lives of believers that hinder their spiritual fruitfulness. While the Greek word (kathairō) is translated “to prune,” it could just as well be translated “to cleanse.” And in the next verse Jesus uses the nominal form of this word to say that the Eleven are “clean” (katharos, καθαρός) by virtue of their response to the teachings of Jesus (John 15:3).

As pruning is absolutely critical to growing grapes, so it is in developing spiritual maturity and fruitfulness. And while spiritual pruning in the lives of believers is productive, it is a painful process! The most productive and fruitful Christian leaders are those whom God has pruned. God’s pruning takes place in different ways and often through humbling experiences. But it is always intended to prepare a disciple for a more fruitful and God-glorifying ministry.

While God “prunes” the fruit bearing branches, “he takes away” (airō) the fruitless branches. The Greek word airō is used twenty-three times in John’s Gospel. In eight places it could be translated “to take” or “to lift up” (John 5:8, 9, 10, 12; 10:18, 24). In thirteen places it must be translated “to take away” or “to remove” (John 11:39, 41, 48, 16:22; 17:15; 19:15, 31, 38; 20:1, 2, 13, 15). How is Jesus using airō in this context? Can the first century cultural background provide a clue?

Bible Word Study: αἴρω, airō

Dillow argues that the fruitless branches are lifted up and encouraged: “A fruitless branch is lifted up to put it into a position of fruit-bearing.” He appeals to R. K. Harrison who writes that fallen vines were lifted “with meticulous care” and allowed to heal. It has been suggested that the vines were allowed to lie on the ground during winter and then “lifted” so they could be productive during the growing season. Dillow adds: “If after this encouragement, they do not remain in fellowship with Him and bear fruit, they are then cast out.”

Radmacher reports seeing vineyards in Israel with the stalks of the grape vines down on the ground. He explains that during the growing season the vine-tenders would place a rock under the vine to raise it up. Several days later they would do this again, repeating the process until the vine is raised up and properly positioned for fruit bearing.

While this interpretation has gained interest in recent years, it does not appear to be supported by the practices of vine growing in antiquity. Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79), a naturalist and a Roman official, explains five methods for arranging vines in ancient vineyards: (1) vines spread over the ground, a method referred to in Ezek 17:6; (2) self-supporting vines; (3) vines with a prop but no cross-bar; (4) a vine propped up by a single cross-bar; (5) a vine trellised on a rectangular frame. Pliny says that vines which are propped or trellised are better for wine grapes since this provides more sunshine, better airflow for getting rid of dew, and easier access for pruning. They were also easier to harvest since the grapes hung down and were more accessible.

Nowhere does Pliny describe a process of “lifting up” the fruitless branches of the vine. In fact, the Mishnah indicates that the wine presented with the offerings in the temple had to be produced from vines that were not trellised, “but only from vines growing from the ground” (m. Menahot 8:6). Dayagi-Mendels explains that vines that spread along the ground are preferred since they produce “a large quantity of fruit” and are “easy to protect from the summer winds.” He adds: “Such vines ripened early in the land of Israel because of the warm ground temperature; this was seen as an advantage. However, the disadvantage for ground spreading vines was that they were easier prey for mice and foxes.”

One could wonder whether the methods of growing grapes have changed in Israel since the biblical period. James S. Snyder, director of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, answers: “Methods for cultivating grapes and producing wine have not changed significantly over the centuries.”

Contrary to the views of some interpreters, the normal meaning of the Greek word airō is “to take away” or “remove.” This understanding has the support of a leading Greek lexicon which cites John 15:2 and says that this word is used of branches that are “cut off.”

POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS

If the fruitless branches are “cut off,” what does this suggest about their spiritual condition and destiny? Some would argue that the fruitless branches represent Christians who lose their salvation. They may have believed for a time, but their fruitlessness indicates they have lost their faith and forfeited their salvation. This interpretation, however, appears contrary to the clear teaching of Jesus in John 10:28–29, that those who are given eternal life are safe in the hands of the Father and Son and “shall never perish.”

Others have suggested that the fruitless branches represent true Christians who are removed to heaven by physical death as God’s final step of divine discipline. They lose their lives, but not their salvation. The difficulty with this interpretation is John 15:6 where the removal of the fruitless branch is a prelude to judgment, not blessed fellowship with Christ in heaven. A judgment by fire is the destiny of unbelievers only (Matt 3:12; 5:22; 18:8–9; 25:41; 2 Thess 1:7–8; Rev 20:15). Although Paul mentions fire in connection with the judgment seat of Christ, it is a person’s “work” that is burned, not the person (1 Cor 3:13, 15). There is no text in the New Testament suggesting believers undergo a judgment by fire where they themselves are burned.

A view that commends itself by the context and the agricultural background is that the fruitless branches represent disciples who are severed from a superficial connection with Christ, the vine. The fruitless branch represents one who has made an external profession of faith that is not matched by a corresponding internal union with Christ.

At first glance, the phrase “in me” (en emoi) appears to be a problem for this interpretation. How can the fruitless branches be “in Christ” if they represent unbelievers? The words “in me” can be understood in either an adjectival or adverbial sense, meaning they can be used to describe a noun or a verb. These words are often read in an adjectival sense in John 15:2: “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away” (ESV). However, every other time the words “in me” are used in John’s Gospel they are used adverbially. This pattern of usage suggests the words should be read adverbially here, too, giving the sense, “Every branch that does not bear fruit in me he takes away.” Bearing fruit is a process that happens only in and through Christ. A branch cannot bear fruit apart from a life-giving connection with Christ, the vine.

THE APPLICATION OF THE ANALOGY (JOHN 15:3–11)

Jesus addresses his disciples in John 15:3 saying, “You are already clean” (katharoi). This is the noun form of the verb kathairō translated in John 15:2 as “he prunes.” Here, the noun form is translated “clean” because of the pruning analogy. The vines are cleaned through the pruning process. Judas has already left the upper room (John 13:27–30), so Jesus is telling the Eleven that they have already been pruned (“you are clean”) and can be expected to produce fruit.

Jesus explains further that the disciples are already “clean” (or pruned) “because of the word” he has spoken to them. This indicates that the Father’s pruning of Jesus’ disciples is not necessarily physical. It can take place through teaching, exhortation, or rebuke (2 Tim 4:2).

Jesus goes on to reveal the secret of bearing fruit (John 15:4–5). As a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is connected with the vine, so Jesus’ disciples will not bear fruit unless they abide in him. There is no fruit bearing apart from abiding in Jesus! Two questions must be answered: (1) What does it mean “to abide”? (2) What does it mean “to bear fruit”?

WHAT IT MEANS TO “ABIDE”

The word “abide” (menō, μένω) literally means “to remain” or “to stay.” The implication of the word is that of a continual, permanent connection or relationship (1 John 3:15). There is a clear relationship in John’s Gospel between believing and abiding. The one who believes in Jesus—that is, who “eats my flesh and drinks my blood” (a concept exegetically parallel to “believes in him”; John 6:54)—abides in Jesus. Everyone who genuinely believes in Jesus does not abide in “darkness” (John 12:46), a Johannine symbol of unbelief (John 12:35–36). John equates confessing Jesus as the Son of God with abiding in God (1 John 4:15). He equates the commandment to “believe” with abiding (menō) in him (1 John 3:23–24). One who allows the gospel message to “abide” in his heart “will abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 John 2:24 ESV). Kent comments, “These passages show that confessing Jesus as the Son of God (i.e., believing in Jesus) establishes the relation of abiding. Thus to abide in Christ is equivalent to believing on Christ.” S. T. James concludes: “In his Gospel, John consistently uses menō to indicate the permanent nature of relationships.” This assessment seems to be especially true in John 15:1–6, which helps explain the rather strange absence of “believe” in this passage.

Bible Word Study: μένω, menō

To “abide” is to maintain a vital (life-giving) contact with the vine, the source of life. Belief is the connection which unites the vine and branches. The lack of fruit indicates that one is not abiding (believing) in Christ. The absence of abiding indicates deficient belief, as seen in John 2:23–25; 7:31; 8:31, 40, 45, 46; 12:11, 37. Tenney refers to this “belief” which falls short of genuine faith as “superficial.” Morris calls it “transitory belief,” which is not saving faith.19 It appears to be based merely on an outward profession which is not an inward spiritual reality coupled with regeneration.

The problem with this “belief” is its content. Such belief is based on something other than a clear understanding of Jesus the Messiah and Son of God. Many people are inclined to believe something about Jesus, but are unwilling to yield him their allegiance, trusting him as their personal sin-bearer. Paul’s comment about the Cretans is a case in point: “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good” (Titus 1:16). If there is no fruit, there is no faith, regardless of one’s verbal profession.

If “abiding” means “believing,” what is the result of not abiding? This is the question addressed in John 15:6 where Jesus explains the destiny of the branch that bears no fruit and is removed. The branch that does not have a life-giving connection with Christ the vine (i.e., “does not abide”) is “thrown away, “withers,” and is “burned.” This corresponds to the tares in Matt 13:40–42 that are gathered, bound in bundles, and burned. In a phone conversation with Nogah Hareuveni, founder of Neot Kedummim (the Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel) and an expert in ancient agriculture, I asked what was done with the trimmings that were pruned from the vine. He answered: “When the branches dry, they make good kindling.”

Only unbelievers are destined for a judgment by fire (Matt 3:12; 25:41). When believers are judged, only their “work” is burned (1 Cor 3:13, 15). The fruitless branches which do not abide are “cast out” (eblethe exo), something Jesus promised he would not do to believers (John 15:6; 6:37). This conclusion may be supported by Jeremiah’s use of the vine imagery to describe God’s judgment of Judah where he writes: “Strip off her branches, for these people do not belong to the Lord” (Jer 5:10).

Some have found it troubling that people who have had some sort of connection with Jesus as professing believers are eventually severed from Christ. But this teaching is not unique to this text. John the Baptist instructed the religious leaders who approached him for baptism to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8). He added, “Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt 3:10). Jesus warned of the same consequences and added, “Thus, by their fruits you will recognize them” (Matt 7:19–20). Paul wrote of the Cretans who professed to know God, “but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for anything good” (Titus 1:16). James wrote that a faith which is not accompanied by actions is “dead” (Jas 2:17).

THE RESULT OF ABIDING

What, then, is the result of abiding? What kind of fruit might be expected of those who have a life-giving connection with Christ the vine? It is often thought that Jesus is suggesting that true believers will be fruitful as they participate in the harvest of souls for the kingdom (John 4:35–38). Others recall the words of Paul to the Galatians where he identifies nine fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23). But sound principles of exegesis require that we consider the immediate context first.

There are six results of abiding that Jesus mentions specifically in the verses following the analogy of the vine and branches: (1) effectual prayer (John 15:7), (2) glorifying the Father (John 15:8a), (3) authenticating oneself as a genuine disciple (John 15:8b), (4) a continued confidence in Jesus’ love (John 15:9), (5) obedience to Jesus’ commandments (John 15:10), and (6) fullness of joy (John 15:11). Other fruit that result from abiding in Christ are not excluded from this list, but these appear from the immediate context and are the focus here.

Jesus’ teaching on the vine and the branches is not intended to undermine a sense of assurance for true believers, those “branches” that have a life-giving connection with Christ, the vine. Nevertheless, self-evaluation is good. Paul does so himself (2 Cor 13:13). Are there people who have merely professed to be Christians without having experienced the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in their lives? If so, this text calls us to recognize the need to trust Jesus alone for our salvation and to enter into the blessings of the New Covenant.

Why did Jesus give this teaching to the Eleven who were true believers? Remember Judas? He had spent three years as an apostle, traveling with Jesus, seeing his miracles and listening to his words. Yet in the end, Judas died in unbelief (John 17:12). On the night of his betrayal of Jesus he left the upper room where the disciples had gathered. John’s words, “And it was night” (John 13:30), reflect the spiritual condition of the heart of one who had cut himself off from Jesus, the light of the world. Jesus gave the analogy of the vine and the branches so that his disciples would be able to distinguish true belief from a mere profession of faith and be able to minister to “professing” believers appropriately.

Fruit bearing inevitably results from abiding (believing) in Christ. If there is no life-giving connection with Christ, the vine, there will be no fruit. Although God alone knows for sure who are his own, the test of fruitfulness will help believers to discern whether or not a professing Christian’s faith is genuine. This spiritual insight is not designed to give us some basis for spiritual pride, but to enable us to minister to those whose baptism or church membership might lead them to think they are believers when in fact they have no vital, life-giving relationship with Jesus, the vine.

# 10 Things You Should Know about Union with Christ

August 23, 2016 by: Marcus Peter Johnson at [*https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/*](https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/)  
This article is part of Crossway’s [*10 Things You Should Know*](https://www.crossway.org/articles/series/10-things-you-should-know/) series.

## 1. The Bible contains an astonishing number of terms, expressions and images that bear witness to the reality of our being made one with Christ Jesus.

In the Newer Testament we find literally hundreds of references to the believer’s union with Christ. To cite merely a few examples, believers are created in Christ ([Eph. 2:10](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%202%3A10/)), crucified with him ([Gal. 2:20](https://www.esv.org/Gal.%202%3A20/)), buried with him ([Col. 2:12](https://www.esv.org/Col.%202%3A12/)), baptized into Christ and his death ([Rom. 6:3](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%206%3A3/)), united with him in his resurrection ([Rom. 6:5](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%206%3A5/)), and seated with him in the heavenly places ([Eph. 2:6](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%202%3A6/)); Christ is formed in believers ([Gal. 4:19](https://www.esv.org/Gal.%204%3A19/)) and dwells in our hearts ([Eph. 3:17](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%203%3A17/)); the church is the body of Christ ([1 Cor. 6:15; 12:27](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%206%3A15%3B%2012%3A27/)); Christ is in us ([2 Cor. 13:5](https://www.esv.org/2%20Cor.%2013%3A5/)) and we are in him ([1 Cor. 1:30](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%201%3A30/)); the church is one flesh with Christ ([Eph. 5:31–32](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%205%3A31%E2%80%9332/)); believers gain Christ and are found in him ([Phil. 3:8–9](https://www.esv.org/Phil.%203%3A8%E2%80%939/)).

Furthermore, in Christ we are justified ([Rom. 8:1](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%208%3A1/)), glorified (8:30), sanctified ([1 Cor. 1:2](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%201%3A2/)), called (1:9); made alive ([Eph. 2:5](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%202%3A5/)), created anew ([2 Cor. 5:17](https://www.esv.org/2%20Cor.%205%3A17/)), adopted ([Gal. 3:26](https://www.esv.org/Gal.%203%3A26/)), and elected ([Eph. 1:4–5](https://www.esv.org/Eph.%201%3A4%E2%80%935/)). Whew! All this without reference to the Gospel and letters of John! Suffice it to say, union with Christ is an absolutely fundamental gospel conviction of the Apostles—dear to them because it was so dear to their Lord.

## 2. When we are joined to Jesus, we are included in the greatest mystery of the universe—the incarnation of God.

C.S. Lewis calls the incarnation of God the Son the “central miracle” of Christianity. He is right. The redemption, restoration, re-creation, and reconciliation of sinners—and all of creation besides—depends entirely on the supreme fact that God, without ever ceasing to be fully who he is, became fully who we are in and as Christ Jesus. Why did God do this? Why is it, in other words, that the “Word became flesh”? The principal reason underlying all the other magnificent reasons that God the Son united himself to our humanity is this: that by the Holy Spirit we may be united to Christ and so enjoy his fellowship with the Father forever. This is eternal life ([John 17:3](https://www.esv.org/John%2017%3A3/)).

## 3. Our union with Christ is profoundly real and intensely intimate.

Union with Christ is not a sentiment, metaphor or illustration, or even primarily a “doctrine”. Nor is it a way of speaking about something else—whether justification, sanctification, or any other benefit of Christ (even if it includes all of these and more!). Our union with the living Christ is the essential truth of our new and eternal existence. In a way that gloriously transcends our finite understanding, we are really and truly joined—spiritually and bodily—to the crucified, resurrected, incarnate person of Christ. There is no better news than this.

## 4. Because union with Christ is so central to the gospel, it has resonated in the teaching and preaching of the Church throughout the ages.

Unsurprisingly, given the ubiquity of the theme in the Scriptures, there is a massive chorus of churchly voices who have emphasized the significance of being united to Christ. This historic theological chorus includes the likes of Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Cotton and Jonathan Edwards (to name but a few).

According to Calvin, our union with Christ is to be accorded “the highest degree of importance.” Why? Because being joined to Jesus is the whole point of the gospel: “For this is the design of the gospel, that Christ may become ours, and that we may be ingrafted into his body.”

## 5. Justification is a magnificent benefit of being united to Christ.

We are not united to Christ because we have been justified. It is quite the other way around: we are justified because we have been united to Christ, who is himself our justification ([1 Cor. 1:30](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%201%3A30/)). We receive Christ’s benefits precisely and only because we receive Christ. Martin Luther knew this well: “But so far as justification is concerned, Christ and I must be so closely attached that He lives in me and I in Him. What a marvelous way of speaking! Because He lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation there is in me is all Christ’s; nevertheless it is mine as well, by the cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the Spirit.”

## 6. Sanctification is a magnificent benefit of being united to Christ.

Christ is our justification, and he is no less our sanctification ([1 Cor. 1:30](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%201%3A30/)). Thus, united to him, we are not only forgiven and accounted righteous, we are also transformed into his holy image. In giving us himself, Christ will no more leave us condemned and guilty (unjustified) than he will leave us corrupted and depraved (unsanctified). This is because, as Calvin so incisively put it, “Christ cannot be divided into pieces.” Jesus is not a partial Savior of a piecemeal gospel. When we are joined to Christ, we receive all of who he is for us.

## 7. Adoption is a magnificent benefit of being united to Christ.

Christ’s self-giving is extravagant. He binds us so completely to himself that we come to share in all that he is as Savior. The gift of sharing in his sonship (adoption) is perhaps the most extravagant gift of them all. When we are joined to Christ by the Spirit, we come to share in the love between the Father and the Son—the very same love the Father has for his beloved Son ([John 17:23](https://www.esv.org/John%2017%3A23/)). As such, God the Father loves us no less than he does his own eternal Son. This love is the love of all loves: it is indissoluble, it brooks no opposition, and is endlessly and everlastingly life giving and joyful. In Christ, we really and truly are the sons and daughters of God forever.

Foundational to believers’ salvation is their union with Christ. In this accessible introduction, Johnson argues that this neglected doctrine is the lens through which all other facets of salvation should be understood.

## 8. The Church is constituted by her union with Jesus Christ.

The reality of salvation and the reality of the church are in fact one and the same reality. To be united to Christ is what it means to be saved. At the same time, to be united to Christ is what it means to be the church: the church, after all, is the body and bride of Christ. A distinction, therefore, between a doctrine of salvation and a doctrine of the church can only be but artificial. There is no salvation outside the church, historic evangelicals have always asserted, just exactly because there is no salvation outside of Christ. We are saved in Christ, and we are the church in Christ. It is the same wonderful gospel.

## 9. Baptism is God’s pledge to us of our union with Christ.

In the waters of baptism, God impresses upon our bodies the truth and reality of our incorporation into the death, burial and resurrection of the living Christ. Baptism, in other words, is a visible and tangible experience of the exceedingly good news (gospel) that we have been crucified in Christ’s death and raised to new life in Christ’s resurrection. Baptism is the sacrament (“mystery”) of our new crucified and resurrected identity in Christ Jesus. Baptism is the “gospel in water,” allowing us to experience in our bodies the truth that we are immersed forever into Jesus Christ.

## 10. The Lord’s Supper is God’s pledge to us of our union with Christ.

In the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, God impresses in our bodies the truth and reality of our ongoing participation in the living Savior. The Lord’s Supper, in other words, is a visible and edible experience of the exceedingly good news (gospel) that Christ dwells in us and that we dwell in him. Christ brought us into the eternal life that he is by giving us himself, and he continues to nourish and sustain us through his real presence. We have really and truly become one with Christ through his gospel, and we continue to receive Christ through the gospel of bread and wine that he has ordained as means of his ongoing presence to his body and bride. “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” ([1 Cor. 10:16](https://www.esv.org/1%20Cor.%2010%3A16/)). Yes, indeed. His body and blood, our salvation.

1. Carson, D. A. (1991). [*The Gospel according to John*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcjohn?ref=Page.p+518&off=1782&ctx=Additional+notes%0a~15:2.+Several+popular+w) (p. 518). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)