

STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

WE MUST ABIDE!

Read John 15:4-8

Introduction

Abiding involves utter dependence upon Jesus the Vine. If we branches don't continue intimately connected to the vine, our "sap" is cut off. We wither and whatever fruit might have been in the process of ripening becomes like dry raisins rather than lush grapes full of juice.

Jesus observes that the branch must remain connected to the vine to produce any fruit. But we've seen this kind of language before. Jesus taught this truth again and again to his disciples:

"... Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner." (5:19)

"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. (5:30)

"... When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things " (8:28b)

"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak." (12:49)

"... The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. " (14:10b)

Jesus again and again spoke and demonstrated dependency on His Father and He is a model for us that our lives must be dependent on the Vine. There's something that perhaps we don't like about this. It diminishes Jesus' independence, we think. And perhaps we resent the statement, "apart from Me you can do nothing," because it diminishes our own sense of independence.

But the path of the Master is a different path than self-determination. It is a path of listening and obeying, of observing and following. Jesus walked this path before us, doing exactly what he saw the Father doing. Now he beckons us to follow him in this same way. It is the path of a disciple following a Master, a Son following a Father. And it requires from us a humility that fully believes that apart from him we can do nothing.

Do you want your life to count for something? Then live your life abiding with Jesus, and with his direction and power accomplish something that lasts. Paul wrote:

" I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Remaining, Abiding in the Vine (15:4-5)

"Remain" (NIV), "abide" (NRSV, ESV, KJV) is *menō*, "remain, stay." It can be used of a location, "stay," often in the special sense of "to live, dwell, lodge." Here, it is in the transferred sense of someone who does not leave a certain realm or sphere: "remain, continue, abide." Those who abide in Jesus' word don't give up under persecution or allow their fruitfulness to be choked by the "weeds" of worldly

pressures (to use the vocabulary of Jesus' Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23). Rather they produce a harvest of 30-fold, 60-fold, or 100-fold. Jesus taught that believers should continue in the faith (Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:3; Luke 8:15). The Apostle Paul also taught that salvation is contingent upon believers continuing or persevering in their faith:

“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (Colossians 1:21-23)

What, then does "abiding" entail? We're not talking about belief as intellectual assent, but belief as embracing, clinging to, and continuing to receive spiritual sustenance from. As can be seen in John (14:15, 21-25) and see later in this chapter (15:9-10), discipleship also involves obedience as an expression of our love for him.

In the face of the clear teaching of John 15, some Christians have an extremely sloppy understanding of the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, asserting that saving faith need not be an enduring faith, one that perseveres. Meanwhile, it is evident that saving faith must progress to enduring faith on the journey of salvation.

Mutual Indwelling (15:5b)

"... He who abides in Me, and I in him." (15:5b)

This phrase intrigues me as He describes here a mutual indwelling between His disciples and Himself, since Jesus also speaks about his relationship with the Father the same way in a number of places in John's Gospel:

*"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood **abides** (menō) **in me, and I in him.**" (6:56)*

*"but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the **Father is in Me, and I in Him.**" (10:38)*

*"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; **but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.**" (14:10)*

*"At that day you will know that **I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.**" (14:20)*

*"Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and **My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.**" (14:23)*

*"... that they all may be one, **as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me... I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one...**" (17:21-23)*

*"... that the love with **which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**" (17:26)*

This mutual indwelling is part of the Father's relationship with the Son. The Father and Son are the exemplars of what our relationship is to be with Jesus – constant living together, sharing a deepening relationship of love and (on our part) obedience.

What are we to make of this? What are we to do about it? Let's not take for granted that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live within us – and we in them. This is your opportunity and mine to really get to know

God intimately, to become his Friend. We talk about a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ." What can you and I do to develop this relationship in a personal, on-going manner? To know God! To abide in Him!

Withered Branches (15:6)

"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned." (v6)

Jesus returns to the analogy of the vine as he describes withered branches. Jesus uses this analogy of withered branches to impress on us the vital importance of staying connected to him, of abiding, continuing in him. To remain, to abide is a command (verse 4), not just a suggestion or something that happens by default without effort on our side. That means that we must do something to obey the command – not a work of righteousness in order to be saved, but active faith.

The lifeless branch bears no fruit and even its wood is good for nothing but burning. This reference to burning and fire raises the association of punishment in the life to come and warns of the great consequences of failing to abide.

We think of how these words would impact the eleven disciples who first heard them. Jesus told them He would depart; yet they would not be disconnected from Him. The work of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, would be to keep them connected to Jesus. If they were disconnected from Him, they would be ruined – perhaps as Judas was.

When Jesus talks here about withered branches being burned, is he talking about backslidden Christians or apostate Christians?

This passage is interpreted at least three ways regarding the security of the professed disciple's position in Jesus.

- The first view believes cast out branches are ones who, though once true believers, end up in hell for lack of abiding and fruit. They were once disciples but are now cast out.
- The second view is that the cast-out branches are ones who only appeared to be disciples, and who never really abided in Jesus, and therefore go to hell (like Judas).
- The third view sees the cast-out branches as fruitless disciples who live wasted lives that are in effect burnt up, and this passage doesn't refer to their eternal destiny.

Which one or combination do you believe Jesus is referring to?

Bearing Much Fruit (15:7-8)

Jesus has explained the negative consequence of not abiding in him (verse 6). Now he points to the positive benefits of abiding (verses 7 and 8).

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so, you will be My disciples." (vv7-8)

If we abide in Christ and in obedience to His teachings, then we can ask anything in prayer, and He'll give it to us. Why? Because we'll be praying according to His will and leading! We'll be requesting things that will expand His kingdom and things that are in His will for us, not just selfish requests.

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." (1 John 3:21-22)

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."
(1 John 5:14)

As He gives us answers to our prayers, that is where the fruit-bearing will take place. Notice another indicator here of being a disciple of Jesus. True disciples bear fruit -- much fruit, "fruit that will last" (15:16c). And this abundance of fruit brings glory to God the Father. As Jesus says in Matthew:

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."
(Matthew 5:16)

What Fruit Does Jesus Expect from Us?

What exactly does Jesus mean by "bear much fruit"? The word *karpos* means fruit, then, "result, outcome, product." To find out what this result is we can do a brief survey of *karpos* in the New Testament. Fruit applies to a new way of life, one's actions, to a way of living.

Fruit can be positive or negative (Romans 6:21-22). False prophets can be identified by their "fruit" (Matthew 7:15b-16a). Both Jesus and John the Baptist demanded repentance. John the Baptist commanded the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his meetings, "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8). Concerning the whole Jewish nation that rejected him, Jesus said, *"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it."* **(Matthew 21:43).**

A number of verses identify fruit with righteous living (Philippians 1:11; James 3:18; Hebrews 12:11). Some passages spell out what this kind of living looks like:

"Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth)." **(Ephesians 5:8b-9)**

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." **(Galatians 5:22-23a)**

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." **(James 3:17)**

This kind of righteous living is what grows on a tree watered by the Holy Spirit.

In addition to speaking of the fruit of righteousness, Paul speaks of fruit as people won to Christ on his mission (Romans 1:13; 15:28; Philippians 1:22). Using our God-given gifts will produce results!

Abiding in Christ produces the fruit of righteous character -- especially of love -- and influence of this character that brings glory to God.

