

Abiding in Christ

A Study-Meditation on John 15:1-11.

Jesus told those who were and would become His future (That's us!) learner-followers, "**I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing**" (John 15:5, NASB). Apart from Him, Jesus said we can do nothing, and that means "no" thing. In contrast to many contemplative-mystics who believe that they can self-engage "spirituality" by doing spiritual disciplines (Contra Galatians 3:3, "**Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**"), *abiding believers* recognize that only in and by Christ can they produce anything of spiritual significance in their lives. That's why Jesus admonishes His followers to abide or remain in Him, for it's easy for our minds and hearts to be mystically "**corrupted** [i.e., distracted] **from the simplicity that is in Christ**" (2 Corinthians 11:3). But what does it mean to abide?

Henry Holloman defines abiding as an, "Intimate spiritual relationship with Christ, characterized by conscious and continual dependence on Him for spiritual nourishment." [1] But how does this intimate spiritual relationship manifest itself in and among believers? John's letters inform us that there are three ways which reveal whether or not we are in "intimate spiritual relationship with Christ," whether we professing Christians are really abiding "in" the Vine.

First, *abiding believers* will remain true to Jesus' **WORD**. In his second letter, John states: "**Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son**" (2 John 9; See John 8:31-32; 1 John 2:24, 27.). Note: Those who do not abide in the Gospel-Word have neither the Father nor the Son! They are *un-abiding unbelievers*.

Second, *abiding believers* show so by their **WORKS**. John asks, "**But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?**" (1 John 3:17; See 4:11-12.). Professing Christians who are not generous to less fortunate brethren demonstrate themselves to be *un-abiding unbelievers*.

Third, those who abide in Christ possess within their hearts the Spirit's abiding **WITNESS** that they're God's children. The witness is twofold. *One*, the Spirit's presence provides assurance that we are God's children. John wrote: "**And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us**" (1 John 3:24b; See 4:13. Compare Romans 8:26-27.). And *two*, the Spirit causes believers to publicly confess Christ Jesus before those who do not know Him (1 John 4:14-15). Those who do not confess Christ in the marketplace of life are *un-abiding unbelievers*.

These three—the Word of Jesus, the Works of believers and the Witness of the Spirit to and through Jesus' branches—are fruit resulting from abiding in the Vine. In distinguishing those who speak truly for Christ from those who do not (i.e., those who falsely speak in Jesus' name) Jesus said, "**You will know them by their fruits**" (Matthew 7:16).

Yet from Paul's writing we become aware of a **forth** evidence of life in the Spirit, of living on the Vine. The Spirit's indwelling also affects the believer's WALK. Where branch-believers are connected to the Vine there will be fruit. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh . . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:16, 22-26, NASB)

Those whose lives are habitually characterized by "**the deeds of the flesh**" are *un-abiding unbelievers* (Galatians 5:19-21).

A little devotional book that reportedly had a great ministry to Abraham Lincoln's soul, *The Believer's Daily Treasure*, contains this little poem expressing a soul's aspiration to abide in Christ. It reads:

Lord of the vineyard, we adore
That power and grace divine,
Which plants our wild, our barren souls,
In Christ the living Vine.

For ever there may I abide,
And from that vital root,
Be influence spread through every branch,
To form and feed the fruit. [2]

In distinguishing true believers from false, possessors from professors, wheat from tares and those who have the Spirit of Christ within them and those who do not, Jesus provided a very simple litmus test. In a word, the test is "fruit." That is why the Apostle Paul spoke of being "**grounded**" in the faith (Colossians 1:23). If truly rooted in the Vine, professing Christians will produce fruit, or else be thrown away as a branch, gathered together with other dried up and dead branches, and burned in the fire (John 15:6; Compare Galatians 5:21 and 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.).

ENDNOTES

[1] Henry W. Holloman, *Kregel Dictionary of the Bible and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005): 8.

[2] "United to Christ," *The Believer's Daily Treasure; or, Texts of Scripture arranged for every day in the year*, Fourth Edition (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1852) January 6

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