

147. The Gospel of John—15:1-8

“The Vine and the Branches” Part 8

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Find this weeks’ sermon audio and video message [HERE](#).

This morning we want to continue looking at the series we’ve entitled, “The Vine and the Branches.”

It comes out of the first 8 verses of John Chapter 15—

John 15:1-2, 8 (NKJV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit... ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

So far in this series, we have looked at:

I. The True Vine-Jesus

II. The Vinedresser-the Father

Starting last week, we began to look at:

III. The Vine Branches

A. Judas Branches—the Professors

John 15:2, 6 (NKJV)

² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...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.

As we said last time, this is the *controversial* part of this passage—who are these branches that don’t bear fruit and are cast out and burned?

I don’t believe the branches that don’t bear fruit are speaking of Christians who don’t bear fruit and are eventually cut off from Christ and cast into hell but rather they are a reference to Judas and all who are like him.

In other words—**phony or counterfeit disciples**, people who look genuine but are only *superficially* connected to Jesus—like Judas which is why some have called these **‘Judas branches.’**—verses 2a, 6

And that brings us to:

B. Jesus Branches—the Possessors

Everything that Jesus has to say to those who are true believers in this passage is built on the concept of **“abiding in Christ”**.

REFLECTION: How would you explain what a “Judas Branch” is to a friend or family member (believer or not):

John 15:4-6 (NKJV)

⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 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.

The word ‘abide’ is a key word in John’s writings occurring 11 times in this Chapter, 40 times in his gospel, and 27 times in his Epistles—but what does it mean?

1. The Definition Of ‘Abide’

The Greek word is ‘meno’ and it means to ‘remain’, or to ‘continue’

2. The Nature Of Abiding

When it comes to abiding in Christ there are two sides to it—union and communion.

a. Union

Union with Jesus is the connection that comes when we put our faith in Him, accepting Him into our heart as our Lord and Savior.

This is a positional connection to Christ which we commonly refer to as salvation.

When I say that this is a ‘positional’ connection I’m saying that it isn’t subject to what we do or don’t do in our Christian lives - it is a gift of grace (salvation) which we receive by faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Since salvation is a gift we didn’t earn—it is therefore something we cannot lose (or forfeit).

>>> I believe the eleven remaining disciples that night had genuinely entered into union with Jesus—which He verifies in verse 3:

John 15:3 (NKJV)

³ You are already clean [cleansed of sin—saved] because of the word which I have spoken to you.

But there was one disciple who wasn't 'clean', that wasn't genuine—one who wasn't saved:

John 13:10-11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ ...and you are clean, but not all of you." ¹¹ For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean." [speaking of Judas]

So, in that regard these disciples had already entered into a *positional* abiding in Christ or in other words—they were genuinely saved.

So, first you have *union* and then communion:

b. Communion

The whole point of salvation is to glorify God by bearing fruit

John 15:8 (NKJV)

⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be [i.e., 'prove to be'] My disciples.

But that won't happen unless we as **Christians stay in a perpetual state of *connectedness to Jesus***—we call this ***communion or fellowship***.

This is a ***practical connection to Jesus*** that ***is*** dependent on what we do or don't do in our Christian lives—which would involve sins of *commission* and *omission*—(Explain—doing what's wrong or not doing what's right).

>>> If we don't stay in communion with Jesus (in unbroken everyday fellowship)—we will never bear fruit, which again, is the ultimate goal of our Christianity.

REFLECTION: Why must Christians have both union and communion with Christ?

When Christians don't abide (don't maintain practical fellowship with Jesus)—they don't lose their salvation, but they do lose their victory over the flesh, the spiritual dynamic that at one time characterized their walk with God and any fruit of the Spirit that was growing in their life.

Then they lose their witness, their opportunities to serve God and ultimately their rewards in heaven—but ***their salvation is secure because it is a free gift of God's grace—"not the result of works..."***

REFLECTION: What is the main point of Salvation?

3. The Practice Of Abiding

a. The outward actions

When it comes to the practice of abiding in Christ on a daily basis, two schools of thought have developed, two approaches that try to address this important issue—the *pacifist* approach and the *activist* approach.

➤ The Pacifist Approach

Those in the pacifist camp say the way to abide in Christ on a daily basis is **to do *nothing* but simply yield to Him and let Him do all the work.**

“Christ lives in you” they say, “and wants to use you the way a hand uses a glove—all the glove has to do is surrender (submit).”

➤ The Activist Approach

Those in the activist camp respond by saying, *“We’re not dead gloves! **We have a responsibility to put the effort into our walk with God and do the things He has commanded us to do.** Yes, we must yield to God, but He won’t force us to do these things against our free will.”*

Actually, both schools of thought contain a measure of truth.

Abiding is not a passive thing, like a glove on a hand, because—a glove doesn’t have an intellect and a will the way a person does.

The glove *can’t* rebel—all it can do is surrender! On the other hand (no pun intended) abiding is not such an active thing on our part that we do *everything*, and God basically does *nothing!*

John 15:5 (NKJV)

⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

I think that Paul struck the balance on this subject when he admonished us as believers to—

Philippians 2:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² ...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

So, Paul is saying that—**God works in—we work out.**

Or in other words—**God has a part and we have a part—God won’t do our part and we can’t do His part.**
(Elaborate)

REFLECTION: What does it mean “God works in us”?

As we surrender—God works *in* us, and then as we obey—God works *out* from our lives His will and purposes.

REFLECTION: What does it mean to the Christian believer “we work out”?

Practically speaking, there are things we must do if we are going to continue abiding in Christ everyday—or else the writers of the New Testament (like Paul) would not have admonished us ‘*to abide*’ (if it were ‘automatic’ because God was doing everything!).

1) Prayer

Prayer is simply talking *with* (dialogue not a monologue) God—in that regard, *communion* is first and foremost communication.

2) The Word of God

John 8:31 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide [continue] in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

1 John 2:3-5, 24 (NKJV)

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him [i.e., “abiding in Him”]...

²⁴ Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

Andrew Murray in his classic work ‘*Abide in Christ*’ (which I have decided to make the book of the quarter) had this to say—

“The more I think of and pray about the religious situation in our country, the deeper my conviction becomes that Christians do not realize that the aim of conversion is to bring them into daily fellowship (communion) with the Father in heaven. For the believer, taking time each day with God’s Word and in prayer is indispensable. Each day we need to wait upon God for His presence and His love to be revealed. It is not enough at conversion to accept forgiveness of sins or even to surrender to God—that is only a beginning. We must understand that we have no power on our own to maintain our spiritual life, We need to receive daily new grace from heaven through fellowship with the Lord Jesus. This cannot be obtained by a hasty prayer or a superficial reading of a few verses from God’s Word. We must take time to come into God’s presence, to feel our weakness and our need, and to wait on God through His Holy Spirit to renew our fellowship with Him. Then we may expect to be kept by the power of Christ throughout the day. It is my aim to help Christians to see the absolute necessity of spending time with the Lord Jesus. Without this, the joy and power of God’s Holy Spirit in daily life cannot be experienced.”

3) **Confession**

Sin severs our communion (practical connection) with God—but *confession* reconnects us to God—

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ If we confess our sins [“to say the same thing”], He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

4) **Obedience**

A life of obedience is absolutely essential to maintaining your communion with Jesus—because again, sin severs our fellowship with God:

Isaiah 59:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear.

1 John 1:6 (NKJV)

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

1 John 2:6 (NKJV)

⁶ He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

REFLECTION: Below are four important things Christians can do to abide in Christ daily – Rate yourself in each category from 1-5 with “FIVE” being outstanding:

So, under the third subpoint—**The practice of abiding** we have seen:

a. The Outward Actions

1) Prayer _____

2) The Word of God _____

3) Confession _____

4) Obedience _____

b. The Inward Attitude

We often make the mistake of thinking that outward actions like reading our Bibles, going to church, praying and serving God will result in our abiding in Him. And certainly, these things are necessary if we want to *keep* abiding in Christ as we have already said—**but only if the motive of our heart is love.**

When a parent tells their child to clean their room—if the child obeys does their obedience automatically demonstrate their love for that parent? Not necessarily—their obedience could be motivated by a fear of consequences if they don't clean up their room, or by the promise of some reward (ice cream).

In other words, their obedience could be totally rooted in self-interest and have nothing to do with loving their parent at all.

The same is true with **our obedience to and service for God—these things might not be motivated by a sincere love for Jesus but by a love of self.** (Explain

Abiding is all about love—a deep love relationship with Jesus which leads to obeying and serving Him out of love!

John 15:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

When we are in love with Him—we will want to read, pray, go to church and tell others about Him—our love for Him will be the motivation for all we do for Him.

But it's possible to be obedient to what God has said and even be serving Him in ministry and yet still not be very close to Him if your love for Him has grown cold case in point, the church of Ephesus:

Revelation 2:2-4 (NKJV)

² I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love ['honey-moon love'].

>>> The church at Ephesus fell into the trap of thinking that *loveless* service was enough to please the Lord.

>>> It would be like a wife who says to her husband, "*I don't love you anymore. I have no feelings for you at all, but I'll stay married to you and clean the house, wash your clothes, cook your meals...*"

What husband would be happy with a relationship like that?

I didn't marry my wife so that I would have someone to cook my meals and clean my house—I can hire a maid to do those things.

I married my wife Cyndi because I fell in love with her and she with me—and now all the acts of service she does for me are special and beautiful *because* I know they are an expression of her love for me—but without the love they would be meaningless.

**It's obvious Jesus feels that same way and wants more than service in our relationship with Him:
He wants passionate, honeymoon love!**

REFLECTION: Why is love so important in our ability to abide in Christ? (and don't say because Paul said so)

Remember He is holding His church in His loving arms with His nail scarred hands which speak of the ultimate act of selfless love—to lay down your life for the person you're in love with.

What kind of love are you giving Him in return?

All Christians love Jesus but not all Christians are 'in love' with Jesus—and there is a difference.

When was the last time you told the Lord, "I love you" and it wasn't tied to something you wanted from Him—it wasn't embedded in some prayer request?

Some marriages have so deteriorated that the words "I love you" are only used when couples want something from each other.

In Jesus' letter to the church of Ephesus He goes on to tell them what they needed to do to get back to 'first love' or honeymoon love in their relationship with Him—

Revelation 2:5 (NKJV)

⁵"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works..."

"First love" can be restored if we follow the three instructions Jesus gave.

1. We must **remember** the love we used to have for Him and cultivate a desire to regain that close communion once again.
2. Then we must **repent**—which means to turn around and forsake any relationship with anyone or anything that is competing in our hearts for the love that belongs to Jesus.
3. We must **repeat the first works**. "Yes, but what does that really mean?"

What were you doing when you were first in love with and on fire for the Lord?

➤ “I was going to church on a regular basis”—**go again!**

➤ “I was getting up early for morning devotions”—**do it again!**

➤ “I sang praise to the Lord as I drove down the street”—**sing again!**

Remember—Repent—Repeat
is the key to restoring your relationship with Jesus.

The passion of Paul the apostle’s life was ***‘That I might know Him.’***

When he said that in Philippians 3—he had already known Jesus for many years as a believer. But Paul wanted to know Him more and more—he wanted a deeper and more intimate relationship with Jesus with each passing day.

The question you need to ask yourself is—**“What is the state of my love for Jesus?”** Not the state of your theology *about* Jesus or the state of your service *to* Jesus—but what is the state of your love for Jesus!

If you’re heart has grown cold in your relationship with Jesus, ask Him to light the fire of passionate love once again so that you might fall in love with your Bridegroom once more.

REFLECTION: Regarding your first love with Jesus – define your remembrance, repentance & repeating your first works:

It’s not too late to rekindle that honeymoon love!

It’s not too late to really start abiding in Jesus in close intimate fellowship and communion with Him—the secret of bearing much fruit!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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