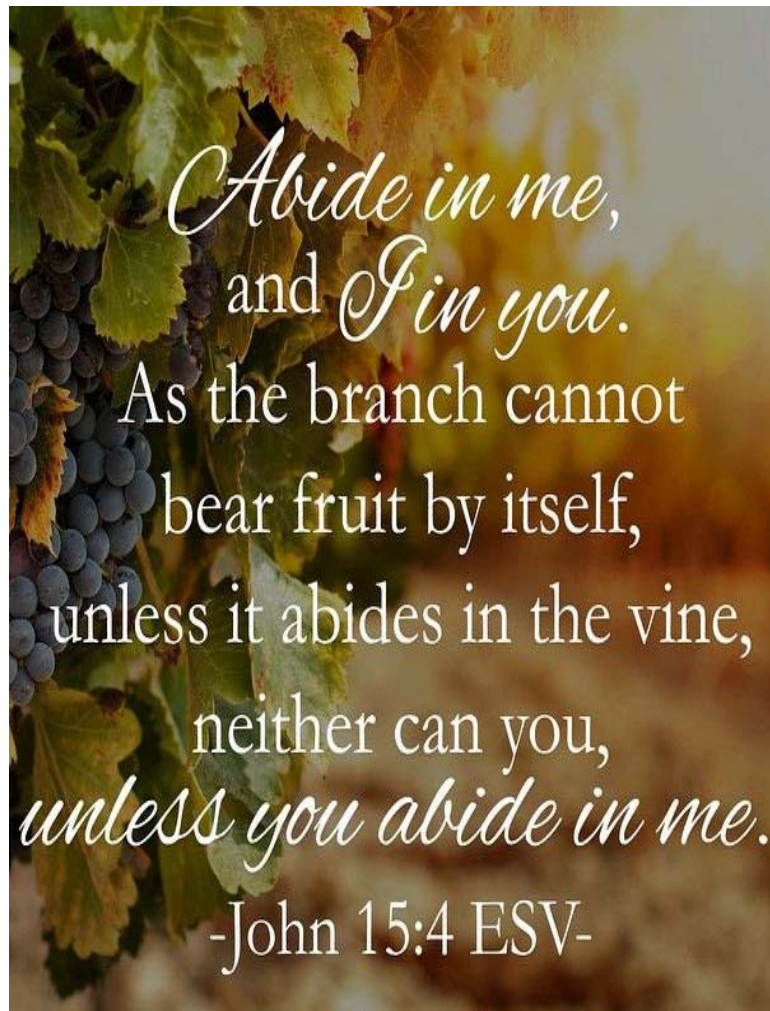


Abiding in Christ



**Challenging Our Thinking
as New Testament
Christians**

Foreword

I can still remember the impact of reflecting upon John Chapter 15, as a new believer, many years ago. I am not saying I understood it all. On the contrary, there was much about which I was uncertain. Nonetheless, I longed to enter into the fullness of its meaning. In time, my desire to grow spiritually led me to the New Testament epistles, and the Gospel of John was set aside.



Now, looking back from a base of understanding of church-age spirituality, I have found that the simple command of Jesus to **Abide in Me** is a tremendous foundation from which to tie together much New Testament truth.

This booklet is a humble effort to share my understanding of abiding in Christ with you, in the hope you might be encouraged in your walk of faith.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Redig'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Abiding in Christ

Let's start our study with a question, and then follow that with a thesis for your consideration. Here is the question:

Does the well-known dialogue between Jesus and His disciples in John Chapter 15 have direct applicability to us as children of God living during the church age?

Consider an especially compelling part of this great chapter:

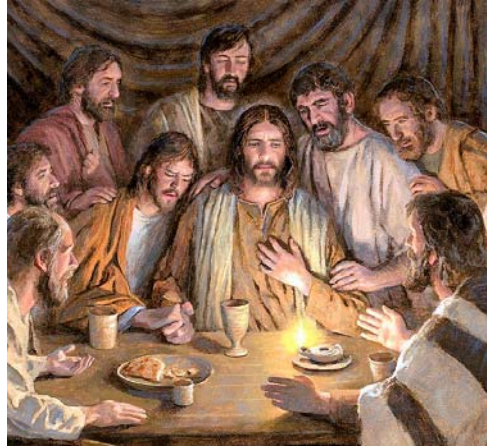
*"Abide in Me, and I in you.
As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself,
unless it abides in the vine, neither can you,
unless you abide in Me.
I am the vine, you are the branches.
He who abides in Me, and I in him,
bears much fruit; for without Me
you can do nothing." John 15:4-5*

Let's break the question down into these parts:

- Does this command to *abide* apply to Israel or to the Church?
- Does it apply to just the 11 believing apostles, or does it carry over into the Church that would begin with Pentecost in Acts 2?
- If it does apply, how does it mesh with the guidance to the Church that is found in the New Testament epistles?
- Has it been superseded, or does it still have a place in guiding our Christian walk?

Most of you are going to have a difficult time reaching a conclusion that the *abide in me* command no longer applies, but, at the same time, have equal difficulty giving definitive answers to these questions. In short, we tend to recognize it as a very powerful and important dialogue between Jesus and His disciples, without being able to articulate how it fits into the guidance given to the Church by Paul and the other writers of the New Testament.

So we now get to the thesis, which is the basis for this little booklet. By the time of the dialogue between Jesus and His disciples in John Chapters 13-17, what is commonly referred to as the *Upper Room Discourse*, Jesus has turned His focus from ministering to the nation of Israel and is now laying the foundation for the Church to come. With that in mind, I would suggest that the command to



abide given in John 15 is meant to be a piece of essential guidance for New Testament Christians. Furthermore, it is meant to be a concise, powerful, and summary reminder of numerous truths expounded upon later in the New Testament. It is meant to tie together much of our walk of faith. So now you know the purpose of this little publication: to attempt to prove this thesis to you and, in the process of doing so, encourage you in the faith.

I. Developing the Text

Please spend some time reading and meditating upon John 15:1-9 before we begin to unravel the details.

In Verse 1, we are immediately faced with the need to decipher a metaphor that Jesus is using in order to powerfully preserve truth for both His disciples and us.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."

It is straightforward to identify the first two players in the metaphor: Jesus is the vine and God the Father is the vinedresser.

Given the time and place for the writing of John's Gospel, think of a grapevine in the land of Israel. The vine is the thick portion that provides support and nourishment to the smaller branches. The branches, in turn, are meant to bear fruit in season. Branches are introduced in Verse 2, but their identity is not made clear until Verse 5:



"I am the vine, you are the branches."

In context, the branches refer to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ—saved individuals. We have now met all three of the players in this extended narrative: the vinedresser, the vine, and the branches. These refer to the Father, the Son, and those who have believed.

Erroneous Interpretation

Before moving on, let me mention that there are those who teach that there are two kinds of branches: those that represent saved individuals and those that represent the unsaved. The saved are the ones that bear spiritual fruit, and the unsaved are those that do not. This erroneous interpretation assumes that every believer automatically bears fruit, which detracts from the whole point of the passage. Jesus is admonishing His followers to abide, so that they will bear fruit. Unfortunately, failure to abide is a very real possibility for every born-again child of God. Jesus is giving this precious last-minute guidance to His followers that they might *finish well!* Consider how Verse 2 settles this issue for us:

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit. . ."

Branches are people in the metaphor and the text clearly states that the branches are “in Me,” Only those who have placed their faith in Christ are said to be identified with Him in this manner. There are no unbelieving branches in the One True Vine. Note that from the beginning we have the possibility that there are branches that are *in Him* but are not bearing fruit. The Vinedresser is going to work to correct this, but to deny it is a possibility is to supersede the text of Scripture with one’s personal theology. We will come back to this and the more controversial portions of this text in the last part of this booklet.

The Heart of the Passage

This brings us again to the heart of the passage:

*“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.
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.” John 15:4-5*

Two things to note about the word translated *abide*. First, it carries the idea of remaining, staying in a given place, and dwelling. A relative from up north who comes for the holidays has come for a visit. One who comes and decides not to leave (who can blame them) is abiding!



Second, the grammar associated with this verb includes the fact that it is in the imperative mood and the active voice. The imperative mood means that Jesus has given a command to His disciples. The active voice indicates that Jesus is asking them to make a choice. He is asking His followers to choose to take up residence in Him and not leave! In your reading of the passage, did you notice how much is at stake with respect to abiding? Consider the following:

- There is no fruit-bearing apart from abiding. (Verse 4)
- Bringing glory to the Father is dependent upon abiding. (Verse 8)
- Apart from abiding, we can accomplish nothing of substance in this life, at least from the perspective of the Lord Jesus. And His is ultimately the only perspective that matters.

Take a moment to consider the following analysis. Shortly after Jesus provided this guidance to the 11 remaining disciples, Peter denied knowing Jesus three distinct times. (John 18:15-27) In doing so, did he bear fruit, bring glory to the Father, or accomplish anything of eternal significance? Easy question, and the answer is, of course, that he did not! But, why did Peter fail so completely?

Let me suggest that it was because he failed to abide in Christ. For his declaration, that "*even if all fall away. . . I never will*" (Matthew 26:33), came not from a position of abiding in Christ but from a position of trusting in his own capability. Our failures in the Christian life are likewise often a failure to abide, a failure to take up residence in the True Vine and remain there.

It is not uncommon for me to meet Christians who are unhappy with their lives and yet are not abiding. Why would we think it could really be any other way? John 15 is meant to be a call to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, *all you who are weary and heavy laden*, and abide in Him. In Christ is the place of abundance, production, and glorifying God.

II. The Basics

If we approach the call to ***Abide in Me*** from the standpoint of the Gospel of John, we can develop a basic understanding of what it means to abide. Consider the following list as a sampling of *the basics*: time, intimacy of relationship, and the Word and the Spirit.

Abiding in Time

The very nature of the word abide connotes the idea of time. As mentioned earlier, it can equally well be translated *to remain*. It is like the acquaintance who stops by for an afternoon visit and you invite them to remain (abide) for dinner. This helps us to understand that attending church on Sunday morning and not giving God any further time during the week couldn't possibly be what it means to abide. A personal quiet time or daily devotionals are not things we do in order to punch our spiritual tickets. Rather, they are meant to be an intentional effort to make sure we focus our attention on the Lord on a regular and recurring basis. For there is no abiding apart from spending time with the Lord.

Intimacy of Relationship

The context in which abiding is used also speaks to intimacy of relationship. By that I am referring to the union between the branch and the vine. Furthermore, the issue of whether or not a branch is abiding in the vine cannot help but bring to mind the agricultural topic of grafting. In order for a branch to be grafted into the vine, a notch is cut in the vine and the freshly cut end of the branch inserted. The branch is then tightly bound to the vine, so that there is solid contact between the two. Over a period of some months, woody fibers start to grow between the vine and the branch. And then only after a firm and solid connection of wood fibers exists, does life-giving sap start to flow into the branch leading to leaves and eventually fruit.

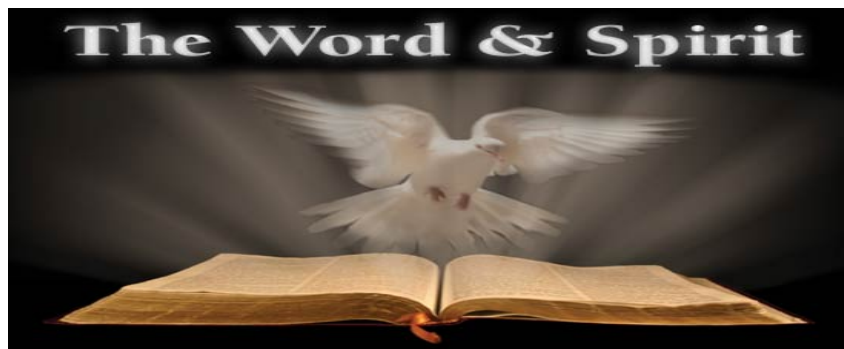
Once again we see the issue of time. There is no solid connection with snippets of time here and there. In addition, we see the intimacy of relationship that exists between the branch and vine. They become one. Jesus is calling us to build a oneness of relationship with Him. Isn't that the way He defines what it means to have eternal life in John 17:3?

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Eternal life isn't meant to begin at some future time when we die. We are meant to experience at least some aspects of it now as we abide, that is, as we come to know the Father and the Son.

The Word and the Spirit.

The first two basics lead us to very natural questions: How do we make use of the time needed to abide? How is it that we are to develop the intimacy of relationship with the Father and the Son that is an intrinsic part of abiding in Christ? The answers lead us to our final item in the list of basics, which is really two items in one—the Word and the Spirit.



If we are going to have an intimate relationship with God, it is going to have to involve His Word and His Spirit. Let's start with the Word. Abiding *in* Him, certainly carries the idea of knowing Him.

How else can we know the infinite Creator God of the universe apart from what He has revealed to us in His Word? I think of my time in the Word as learning what is on the mind of God, of thinking His thoughts after Him. I do this so that I might learn to share His thoughts and affections and understand His purposes. If we want to be Christians set apart as unto the Lord, the Word of God must very definitely be involved. For Jesus prayed to the Father on behalf of His disciples:

*"Sanctify them by Your truth.
Your Word is truth."* John 17:17

It is the truth that sets us apart to God, and I would suggest it is our understanding and faith response to the truth that is part of abiding in Christ. There is only one place we can be certain of finding the truth and that is the Word of God. And how does the Holy Spirit factor in to all of this?

BE FILLED
WITH THE
HOLY
SPIRIT
Continuously

First, the Holy Spirit both teaches and reminds us of the Word we have learned:

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth. . ." John 14:16-17

". . .the Holy Spirit. . . will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26

Not only is the Holy Spirit our teacher, but He dwells within those who have placed their faith in the person and work of Christ as part of the new life that is the heritage of all who believe:

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive. John 7:37-39

As you can see, the Spirit and the Word play an essential role in abiding. For it is the Spirit who fills and enables the child of God and it is the Word that progressively sets us apart unto the Lord as we are transformed by it.

III. Four Deeper Considerations: What It Means to Abide in Christ

Everything we have discussed thus far is readily found within the context of Chapter 15 or the text of John's Gospel. This brings us to the point where we can challenge ourselves to think more deeply. Consider these questions: Is John's Gospel the extent of the development with regards to the concept of abiding in Christ? Can we really say with certainty that it is part of the walk of the New Testament Christian? Does the concept of abiding show up in the writings of Paul, Peter, and the other writers of Church-age doctrine?

Again, my thesis is this—the teaching of Jesus to abide in Him is the foundation upon which much New Testament doctrine is meant to hang. It is a concept that can be found over and over again throughout the New Testament. It is a concise *call to arms* that can be readily used to assess our own walk on a regular basis. To prove this to you, let me suggest four examples from the New Testament that demonstrate just how deeply this concept runs throughout the breadth of the New Testament.

A. It is imperative that we abide in Jesus Christ as Church-age Christians, for He is the ultimate source of all that God has provided.

In reality, this is an inexhaustible topic for the simple reason that in Christ,

*. . .are hidden all the treasures of wisdom
and knowledge. Colossians 2:3*

So let me introduce you to the idea by giving you a succinct synopsis of what I am trying to communicate.

As a sampling, consider three of the many examples we could explore that demonstrate that Christ is the ultimate source of all that God has provided. Every believer can make these statements:

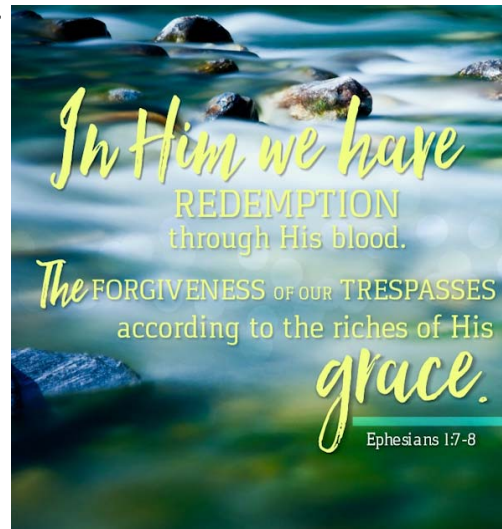
- Because the Lord Jesus died for me, I have forgiveness and redemption regarding sin.
- Because He rose from the dead, I too have newness of life.
- Because He has been exalted to the place of greatest honor, I have received the Holy Spirit.

These three statements suffice as a helpful starting point. Now let's support each of these statements with Scripture.

Forgiveness and Redemption. Because the Lord Jesus died for me, I have forgiveness and redemption regarding sin.

*In Him we have redemption through His blood,
the forgiveness of sins. . . Ephesians 1:7*

We have both redemption and the forgiveness of sins through the work of Christ on the cross. And notice how specifically the text points out that these are ours—**in Him!** The work of the cross is adequate to redeem every last human being. Christ paid the sin debt for everyone who has ever lived. But His finished work leads to redemption and forgiveness for those who are said to be **in Him**, and this is the case only for those who have received God's gift of salvation by faith.



Newness of Life. Because He rose from the dead, I too have newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. . . Romans 6:5

There are actually two additional things listed in the text that we have as the result of our identification with Christ. Not only have we been identified with the death of Christ, that the power of the sin nature over our lives might be broken, we have also been identified with His resurrection that we too might walk in newness of life. Again, notice that it is **His** death and resurrection we share!

Holy Spirit. Because He has been exalted to the place of greatest honor, I have received the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.
Acts 2:33

This is an often overlooked passage. Apparently, as part of His exaltation to the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit was received by Christ. He in turn poured out the Spirit on those who had put their faith in Him. Again, the point is that our receipt of the Spirit has its ultimate source in Christ.

Starting with just these three examples, there are a number of observations we can make. First, we have a marvelous defining illustration of the grace of God. For not just are we saved by grace, but every aspect of God's plan and provision is thoroughly grounded in grace! Do we have remission of sin because we earned it, or because Christ was crucified? Do we have new life in Christ because of works that we have done, or because Christ was raised from the dead? Has the Spirit been outpoured on all those who believe because we are somehow worthy, or because the Lord Jesus Christ was found to be

the ultimately worthy One and exalted to the place of highest honor? There is no more helpful pattern in the Christian Life than to become accustomed to looking to God to supply our every need, in spite of a lack of personal worthiness. Once we start to think that we are deserving before God, we have *swerved off course* (Galatians 5:4) from the grace of God that is available to us in Christ Jesus.

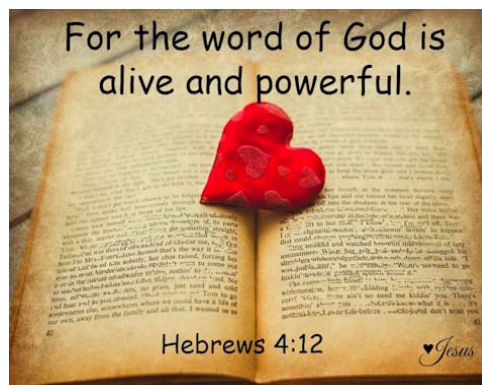
Second, these examples are just the tip of the iceberg. They are helpful in that they cover the basics: forgiveness of sin, newness of life, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. However, if we were to cover the scope of New Testament Scriptures, we would discover that we could push this principle much further; namely, Christ is the ultimate source of all that God has provided. For example, our eternal life is ultimately in the Son:

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 1 John 5:11

We would also discover that the very righteousness by which we are justified before God is likewise to be found in Christ:

... you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness. . .
1 Corinthians 1:30

Why even the Word of God is said to be “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16), so that when we open its pages we might come to grips with that which is “*God-breathed*” and “*alive and powerful.*” We are actually coming to the Living Word which stands behind the written word and gives it both its authority and its power!



We can summarize all that we are discovering by going to II Corinthians 1:20:

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Why is it essential for us to abide in Christ? For He is the one and only place where the promises of God are fulfilled. Furthermore, it is only as we acknowledge this—only as we turn to God and say, "Yes Father, I see all that You have provided has been given to me in Christ!"—that we say, "Amen" to the Father and give glory to Him for all He, in grace, has provided to us.

My Personal Testimony. Let me insert a bit of my own personal testimony. As I began to grow spiritually as a new Christian, I felt the need to do more of some kinds of things and *stop doing* other kinds of things. Actually, on a number of occasions I made quite lengthy lists of each. It is quite natural to do so as one studies the Word of God. Unfortunately, those lists reduced the Christian Life to my efforts to do more of certain things and do less of others. This led to a plateau in my Christian life, and a great deal of frustration, as I learned it is impossible to live the quality of life laid out in the Scriptures in one's own strength—even if a good deal of pleading to God for help is included.

The reason for my struggle was because the Christian Life isn't about my doing more or less. I started to grow again, when I focused less upon my lists of do's and don'ts, and focused instead upon knowing Christ more fully—that is to say, *abiding in Him*. For to the extent I grow in my relationship with Him by means of abiding in Him, His life will become more and more manifest through Me. This is to understand that any victory I might have in the Christian Life is to be had in the One Victor! Any liberation I might experience will be experienced in the One Liberator. Any fruit I might bear will only come from the life that is resident in the One True Vine!

B. Our position in Christ, as found in the first three chapters of Ephesians, is part of what it means to abide in Christ and is contrasted with *apart from me*.

I love the content of Ephesians, but until recently I had not made the connection between the first three chapters of Ephesians and John 15. Consider a few of the great truths we have discovered during our study of Ephesians. In Chapter 2 we learned that we have been made alive, raised up and seated in the heav-



enies and—here is the really important part—all of this is true ***in Christ***. In other words, our identification with Christ is such that it is *in Him* that we have new life and a position in the heavenlies. Now, here is the connection we are commanded to make: trusting in who and what we are in Christ as laid out in Ephesians Chapter 2 is exactly what the Lord Jesus wants us to do as part of abiding in Him. It must be so, for to see ourselves as God has identified us with His Son is to *remain* in Him. To fail to do so is to operate in unbelief, which is to fail to heed the very principle of John 15.

Then consider the content of Ephesians Chapter 1. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we have been "*blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ*." Again we see the blessing of God is solely in Christ. And this statement of God's grace to His children is followed by a partial listing: chosen to be holy and blameless before Him, adopted as sons, accepted in the Beloved, redeemed and forgiven of sins.

In the context of the book of Ephesians—the Christian’s marvelous position in Christ is thoroughly developed before moving on to what it means to live a worthy Christian Life. That’s because apart from abiding in Christ—and that means standing firm in the unassailable nature of our position in Christ—there is no worthy walk. One can establish a certain brittle self-righteousness that is based upon legalism, or wallow in failure induced self-pity. But God’s plan is for us to learn to abide in who and what we are in Christ first, and then learn to live the Christian Life from the Source in whom we abide! This Source is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ!

C. Abiding in Christ is intimately connected to learning to *rest* in the truths we have been systematically learning.

To learn about the *rest* of God we need to turn to Hebrews Chapters 3 and 4. Beginning in Hebrews 3:7, the writer of Hebrews is admonishing Christians to enter the *rest* that God provides for His people. Over and over he is going to show that unbelief is what keeps us from entering that rest, while it is ours if we take God at His word and trust what He says.

In context, the writer uses the Exodus generation as an example. The response of this generation to the Pass-over, as well as I Corinthians 10:4, makes it clear that we should consider the Exodus generation as those who have believed unto salvation. Nonetheless, they were not able to enter the place of rest—the *abundant* life that God had for them in the promised land:

So we see they could not enter in because of unbelief. Hebrews 3:19

Nonetheless,

... a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.
Hebrews 4:1

How is it that we could fall short of entering the rest of God, and what is this rest? Hebrews 4:11 is very helpful in answering the first question:

*Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest,
lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*

As you can see, it is unbelief that prevents us from entering the place of rest that God has prepared for us. As for what is this rest? It is the place where we cease to manipulate the vagaries of life to our own ends and instead trust in the promises and provision of God.

Now have you made the connection? To rest in the promises and provision of God is once again a part of what it means to abide in Christ. You see, circumstances can both discourage us and make us afraid. We can also misunderstand the Christian Life to be a call to churn out good works in order to earn the favor of God. When any of these dominate our thinking we are outside of the place of rest God intends for His children, and we have failed because we have not labored to enter that place of rest God intends. Or, stated another way, we have failed to labor to abide in Christ! Even as children of God, it is often not our natural inclination to seek to abide in Christ. For both the enticements of this world and its dangers can be a great distraction to us. That is why we must mentally labor to abide in Christ—the source of both our life and rest!

**D. The promise of Christ abiding in us,
at least the fullness and richness of all that
potential, is dependent upon us first
abiding in Him.**

It is as simple as: *Abide in Me, and I will abide in you.* In other words, Christ abiding in us does not come until we are first abiding in Him. I am not in any way talking about our salvation, but rather the abundant life and intimacy of relationship that is available for the believer *in Christ*. The word translated abundant means that which is overflowing, superior in quality, and of great advantage. It refers

to the depth and quality of the relationship that can be ours as the result of *abiding* in Christ.

This is not the only place in Scripture we see this kind of *cause and effect*! In Matthew 11:28 we find:

*"Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy-laden,
and I will give you rest. . ."*



Before Christ will give rest, we must come to Him! Perhaps the most startling example is in Revelation Chapter 3. Jesus tells the church of Laodicea that it was lukewarm, that they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked! And then He does something that we must understand. He tells them:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Revelation 3:20

Are you grasping this? This struggling group of believers who have lost their zeal for the Lord, becoming lukewarm to the point they are about to be spewed out, also receives the tenderest of promises. If they will just turn to the Lord, and abide in Him, then their fellowship will be restored. Make no mistake about it, Jesus is, in effect, saying, "You respond first!" Not in terms of salvation, but in terms of the abundant life. And not in terms of initiating the abundant life—for it is fully prepared for those who will abide.

What I am wanting us to see is that the fullness of what God has in grace provided is dependent upon our responding, in faith, to Him! We feel as if we need to keep a foot in the world lest we miss out. But the truth is, once we have found Jesus we can stop looking. *Abide in Me* paves the way for *I in you*—the abundant life will follow!

IV. Don't Be Misled

After what we have learned you might be surprised to learn that there are those who interpret the call to ***abide in Christ*** in John 15 as a call to salvation. They insist that to abide is to be saved and to fail to do so, in particular a failure to bear fruit, is to be lost. Those who choose this interpretation most often point to Verses 2 and 6:

"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."

"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."

Consider the Context

Consider the following so that we might not lose the essential thrust of this passage as a command to be pursued by all born-again believers:

- To bring lost individuals into the audience for this passage is to completely ignore the context. For the audience is the 11 believing disciples of Jesus—Judas has already left. Without question, this message is directed solely to believers in its original context.
- To hold to this position is to fail to grasp the meaning of the word *abide*. The word means to remain, to dwell, to stay. It does not mean to gain something you do not have (salvation), it means to stay in a place at which you have arrived. It means to grow in depth of relationship with your Lord—like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to what He had to say. (Luke 10:39)

- As early as Verse 2, we read,

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit. . . .”

We have already seen that the 11 have been identified as the branches. (Verse 5) Now, who is it that can be said to be a branch *in Me*? A lost individual is never, never said to be *in Christ*. Only the child of God is so intimately identified with the Lord Jesus that He would say that you are “a branch *in Me*.” Look at what the passage makes clear right from the beginning: It is possible for a branch in Christ to not bear fruit! Why? Now that we understand the passage, we know the reason why—a failure to abide!

What’s the solution? The answer is to confess our failure and pursue abiding in Christ and from that position the life of the Vine will flow and we will at some point be able to bear fruit. As is always the case, to misinterpret this passage and reduce it to an issue of salvation is to miss its entire point as a cautionary message to the Believer. It is meant to keep us from squandering what could be ours as Christians!

Consider the Verses

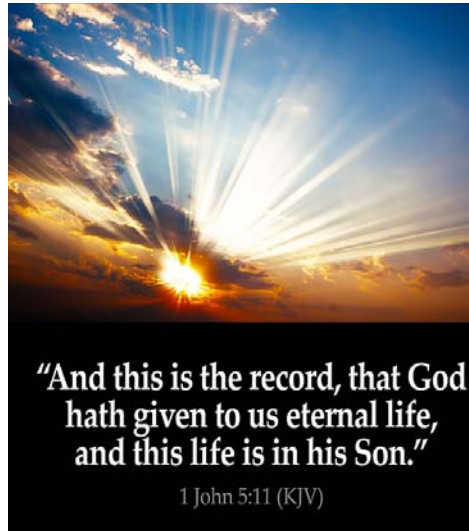
So what about the verses that seem to indicate salvation might be at stake? Or, even more shockingly, that seem to imply that it might be possible for us to lose the salvation we have? Let’s look at the two most common verses used to support this now clearly incorrect position.

Verse 2 says:

*“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.”*

In context, the *He* is a reference to the vinedresser—God the Father. This verse introduces us to two possibilities—branches that do not bear fruit and branches that are not fully productive. (There is a third possibility later in the passage, and that is branches that bear *much fruit*.)

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, this is actually a pretty good picture of our lives—times of no production, some production, and, hopefully, much production. Again, I trust you can see the problematic nature of defining the saved as only those who are bearing much fruit. If that were true, we would all be in trouble wouldn't we? Neither could we ever have assurance of our salvation in direct contradiction of 1 John 5:11.



"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

1 John 5:11 (KJV)

Now, I have a pretty strong agricultural background, so this passage about the vine and vinedresser resonates quite clearly with me. I know exactly what to do with vines that are under-producing: prune them back so that they can reach their intended production. Pruning requires a cutting away of the plant to force greater production, and how often our heavenly Father has to prune away unproductive parts of our lives—perhaps worldly entanglements—that we might be more fully productive.

And what about those branches that bear no fruit.? In this verse, the New King James translates a single Greek word as the phrase *He takes away*. This word can equally well mean *He raises up*. With the family garden in view, this immediately brings to mind an image. I can remember often after a rainstorm helping my Mom to carefully raise up branches that had been beaten down into the mud by the rain that they might continue to grow. Many a developing tomato plant, after being raised up in such a manner, eventually bore abundant fruit.

Can you not see our heavenly Father using this as an illustration of how He acts in the lives of His children? Naturally, for He would do that and much more!

And then what about Verse 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."

For many, this is proof that some branches are not saved. For others, the verse indicates that a saved person can lose their salvation if they do not follow through on their faith. In the context, that would be failing to abide. Let's briefly analyze these claims.

As for losing one's salvation, do you suppose it could be as the result of being faithless? If so, that would certainly fit with a failure to abide. Thankfully, the Word of God has already addressed such a possibility:

If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. II Timothy 2:13

We may be faithless toward Christ, but He does not respond in kind. Why not? Since we are **in Him** to do so would be to deny Himself, which He cannot do!

Of course this makes perfect sense if we think it through. We were not saved because of our faithfulness. Why in the world would we think that faithfulness on our part is now necessary to keep that which we had never earned or deserved? If our salvation rested on our faithfulness, our salvation would ultimately be by merit and not by grace, which is an insult to the grace provision of God.

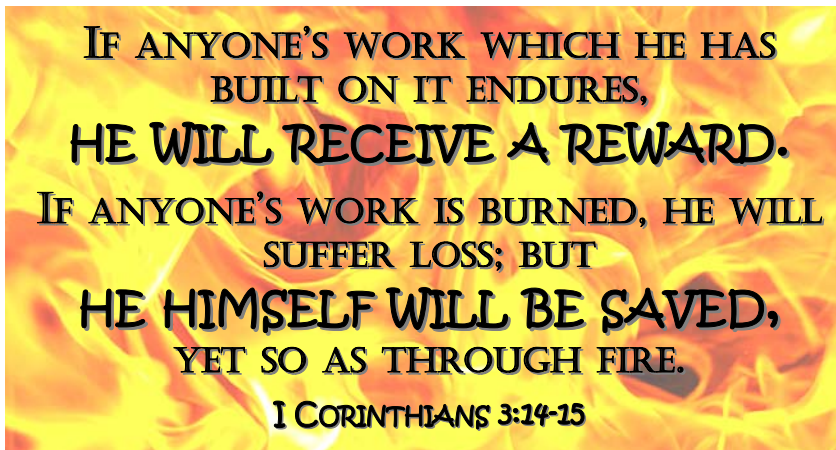
Now let me be clear, I am not in the least promoting or excusing a lack of faithfulness, for it can have terrible consequences in the life of the believer! It is just that loss of an eternally secure salvation, one that has been provided from the grace of God, is not one of those consequences.

Our Salvation is Secure. As a second passage to consider, read I Corinthians 3:11-15. In this passage are two things that relate directly to John 15:6, the lack of fruit and fire. First, consider the closing verse of this narrative and we will work backwards:

*if anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss;
but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."*

Study the context and see if what I am saying is true:

- We have the example of a life that has been built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, that is, a branch that is **in Him**.
- There is the potential that some lives will bear no fruit—only wood, hay, and stubble.
- The substance of this life is going to go up in smoke, and there will be no reward.
- Yet as Verse 15 makes clear, the salvation of this individual, despite the lack of bearing fruit, is not in question. Again, that is because, not only are we saved by the grace of God, we are also kept by His grace.



Despite all the proof, many will still ask: "What about the branches that are thrown into the fire and burned?"

This is a very problematic statement, is it not? Do you know what is at least part of the reason for this? We have trouble with the grace of God. We always suspect that somewhere around the corner we are going to find conditions for our salvation, or that God is watching us very closely just waiting to take back His gift! That is the way the world works, but not our gracious and loving God. So let me explain John 15, Verse 6. It starts with the phrase:

*"If anyone does not abide in Me,
he is cast out as a branch and is withered. . ."*

As we have seen from John 15:2, it is possible to be a branch in Christ that does not bear fruit—a Christian that is not abiding. What happens when this is the case? If it is a real branch, it falls to the ground and any leaves start to dry up and shrivel. Now, can we take the metaphor and apply it to the Christian Life? Easily! If a Christian ceases to abide—fails to spend time in the Word and be filled with the Spirit and all the other things we have been learning—then you can know for certain his or her spiritual life will shrivel up as well! The passage continues:

*". . . and they gather them and throw them into the fire,
and they are burned."*

What happens to the real branches that fall from the tree and shrivel up? Any responsible vinedresser keeps his vineyard clean by gathering the branches and burning them. They are too small for building and not substantial enough to use for warming the house. They are just burned as waste. At this point, we have to be careful not to read too much into the metaphor. Nowhere does it say believers who do not abide are burned. It says dry and withered branches are burned, for the simple reason that is what was done with them. What about believers who do not abide? Certainly, the verse is not teaching they are burned in hell, especially considering verses such as:

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those
who are in Christ Jesus. . . Romans 8:1*

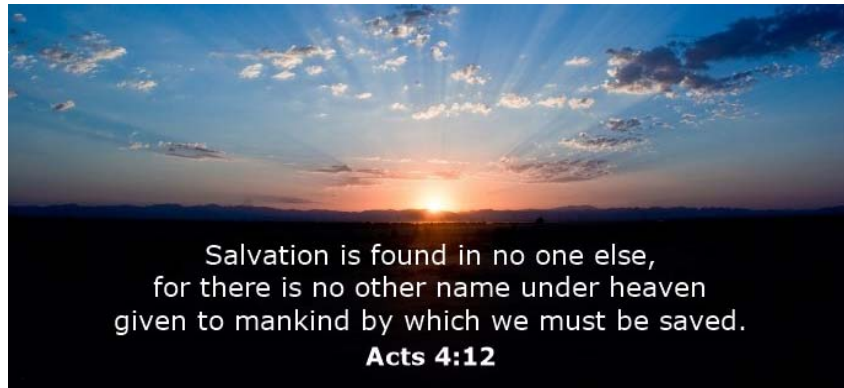
Notice the phrases “*in Christ Jesus*” and “*branches in Me.*” There is no condemnation for either one. What then can we learn from the metaphor? Branches that do not produce are of no value in the vineyard; and Christians that are not bearing fruit, that are not allowing the life of Christ to be manifest in their lives, are of no value in accomplishing the plans and purposes of God. Of course, God will never be faithless to those who are His own. Unproductive believers never lose their salvation but they can lose their reward and may receive discipline.

Let us just hope the Word of God and the conviction of the Spirit of God reach such a believer before too much time has passed! Perhaps even the message of this booklet can lead such a one to turn to the Lord in repentance and once more pursue abiding in the True Vine, the source of our very life and He who produces the fruit that we are to bear! What a pitiful thing it is to relegate this marvelous passage to describing the lost rather than challenging the saved. Perish the thought that we would ever doubt the gift of salvation that was earned through the precious blood of Christ!

Summary

So as this little booklet comes to a close, let's summarize the message. The powerful and concise command of Jesus, *Abide in Me*, was given to His closest followers at the close of His earthly ministry. This command, however, has a lot more applicability than we might realize if we limit it to the context of John's Gospel. If we understand that it is essential foundational guidance upon which much church-age doctrine is developed, then all of a sudden we begin to see related truth throughout the Scriptures. For example, it allows us to see that all of God's promises to us ultimately reside in Christ. It is a call to know our unsalvageable position in Christ and to labor to rest, by faith, solely upon it. It reveals the intent of the Lord Jesus, that as the result of our abiding in Him, He might abide in us, that His life might manifest itself in us

leading to an overflowing, abundant life that is superior in quality and of great advantage. It is my prayer that we would abide in the True Vine that is the Lord Jesus Christ and that we would bear much fruit to the Father's glory!



If, by some chance, you have read this far and are not yet certain that you are a branch in the True Vine, or if you do not know for certain that you have eternal life. Then, I would encourage you to take a moment to turn from the fruitless promises of this world, including any kind of religious ritual, and turn to the One who can save—the Lord Jesus Christ. Heed His words in John 6:37:

“. . . whoever comes to Me I will in no wise cast out; whoever comes to Me from within will flow streams of living water; whoever comes to Me will have eternal life.”

How do you come? By turning from all else and trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ. His person in that He is the eternally existing second person of the Trinity—God who became flesh. His work—in that He went to the cross in order to bear our sins, paying a debt we could never pay, and then was raised to the place of highest honor at the right hand of the Father. It is faith alone in this Christ alone that will save you and bring you into the blessedness of being a branch in the One True Vine. You can do so in the quietness of your own soul right now—to the glory of God and your eternal blessing!

VISTOSO

Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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