

Logan Smith
September 7th, 2025

John 15:1-17

Abiding in Christ

A few years back, my wife signed up for a deal where we got a bunch of baby trees for like a dollar a piece. It was a great deal. The one downside, though, is that they would be shipped in the mail a few months after you sign up - and it just so happened they arrived while we were out of town. So what happens when you leave plants in a box, out of the soil, out of the sunlight, out of the water, for a few days? They begin to wither and die, obviously. We put them in water and light and got them planted in the ground as soon as we could, and thankfully, some of them survived! But most of them died; they lacked the nutrients they needed to survive and produce leaves; even when planted back in the soil, though they gave the appearance of life for a little while, they didn't make it; they withered and died and were fruitless. And so the only thing to do was pluck them up and cast them in my brush pile.

Now, I'm assuming all of us here today know that plants can't survive without being planted in soil, light, and water - without being connected to roots that soak up all the nutrients they need to live and grow. None of us (I hope) would snip a branch off of a raspberry bush and throw it on the kitchen counter by itself and expect it to keep producing raspberries. And yet, how often do we make the mistake of thinking that we can get by on our own just fine? That we have things all under control? That we can handle all our problems if we just muster up enough willpower, self-discipline, and hard work? How often do we rely on ourselves, on our own strength and wisdom, instead of relying on God? I think we're all prone to rely on ourselves. Like when we grow lazy in guarding our hearts against sin because we think there's no way we'd fall for that one again; we're better than that, right? And then we prove that we're not, falling flat on our face again. Or when we expect life to go great when we rely on our own plans, while ignoring God's commands. Or when we think we know better than God. Or when we expect to be have a good, fruitful, productive life while neglecting Bible reading, prayer, and church life - and then are surprised when it doesn't work.

We're just like plants; we can't survive without the spiritual soil and nutrients we need: God Himself. We're branches, and we can't survive or bear fruit apart from our vine: Jesus Christ. We must be connected to Him and abide in Him, through a life of ongoing, active faith.

Intimacy and union with Christ is the lifeblood of genuine, fruitful, joyful, and loving Christianity. That's what we see here in our passage, John 15:1-17. Beginning with point 1...

I. The Necessity of Abiding: Jesus is the vine and we must abide in Him to be saved and bear fruit (1-6)

Our passage begins, in v.1, with Jesus proclaiming the very last of His famous "I Am" statements in the book of John: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser." And then again, in v.5: "I am the vine and you are the branches." This I Am statement is interesting; it doesn't just tell us who Jesus is, but also who is Father is, and who *we are* when we are connected to Christ through faith. What He is saying is that He is the true context of the people of God, and that in order to be part of God's people - those who are lovingly cared for and saved by God, those whom He prunes and cares for so that they bear fruit - we must be connected to Jesus, the only true vine.

To really grasp what Jesus is saying here, we need to understand that He is referencing a theme common throughout the Old Testament, where Israel, God's covenant people, is depicted as a vineyard and God is depicted as the vinedresser, the owner of the vineyard. We especially see this in the book of Isaiah. In Isa. 5:1-7, God plants Israel as his vineyard, lovingly cultivates and prunes them so that they will grow and bear fruit, but also judges and destroys His vineyard for being faithless and fruitless. This is a poetic summary of Israel's entire history, where God formed Israel as His covenant people over many generations by calling Abraham's to Himself, like clearing the ground and planting the seeds of a new vineyard. He gave them covenant promises, Law, temple worship, Kings, and so many experiences of His glory, grace, and faithfulness. But they continued in sin and idolatry; over the centuries, they abandoned God for idols and wickedness; they were faithless to God. They were like a vineyard that didn't bear grapes but only worthless thorns. So God burned the vineyard and got rid of the worthless vines through the exile, where Israel underwent the judgment of God by being taken over by foreign empires. But then, in Isa. 27:2-6, God picks up this vineyard imagery again, where God promises that there would be a coming day of Messianic fulfillment in which God's vineyard, the people of God, would be restored and would bear fruit, even filling the whole world with fruit, and would not even have thorns and briars growing among them. It's a beautiful promise.

And what Jesus is saying here is that *He is the fulfillment* of this promise. Jesus Christ is the true vine, the true vineyard of God, that is perfectly faithful and fruitful. Jesus is the true

Israel, the true people of God. And all who abide in Christ, the true vine, are true branches - part of true Israel, God's true covenant people. You are no longer part of God's covenant people based on who you're parents are, like it used to be for Israel in the Old Testament. Nor can you earn your way into God's favor by bearing a bunch of fruit and being righteous and holy enough on your own to impress God. No, the only way to get in, the only way to be part of God's people, the only way to be part of the True Israel, the true covenant people of God, and to be saved and please God without lives is by being connected to Jesus Christ, the true vine, through *personal repentance and faith*. It begins with repentance: we must acknowledge that we, like Israel, are fruitless vines on our own, who can only produce thorns and briars; we cannot produce the fruit of righteousness and obey the Law of God. We deserve eternal judgment, death, and the wrath of God. Yet we repent of our sins and turn to Jesus, in faith, believing the good news of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is the promised Savior who alone perfectly obeyed God's law - the only truly fruitful vine - and then bore the judgment that we deserve, dying in our place on the cross! But then He rose again on the third day, being vindicated by God before all as God's chosen, beloved, fruitful vine. The second we repent and believe in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, we are *connected to Him*. We become part of God's redeemed people through faith in Christ.

In theology, we call this our "Union with Christ." It's an incredibly important doctrine. It means that we are united to Christ, by grace through faith in Him, just like branches in a vine; by being *in Christ*, we are able to receive all that we need for spiritual life and salvation; we receive every spiritual blessing of salvation - justification, sanctification, glorification, and all the rest - *from Jesus*, like branches receiving what they need from the vine. Apart from Christ, we're like a dead branch cut off from its roots. We see this in vv.4-5: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Christ alone is the context of salvation. He is the vine, and all who repent and believe in Him, all who are truly Christians, are branches in Christ.

But here's another important thing that we must grasp from this passage: all who truly abide in Christ will be *faithful and fruitful* in Christ, *because* He abides in us. Whoever abides in Christ *will* bear fruit. Or put another way, whoever is truly a believer will bear the fruit of faith: a more Christlike life of love and obedience to God. Now, this isn't because our obedience and

righteousness saves us or makes us branches in God's vineyard; no, we've already seen that Christ alone is the fruitful vine, and we have to be *in Him* through faith first. Repenting and believing in Christ comes first, *then* fruit is produced in our lives, not the other way around. Being in Christ saves us, not our fruit; but fruit shows that we are truly believing in Christ, it proves that we will be saved. All who abide in Christ *will bear fruit*. God even prunes us, sanctifying us even through trials in our lives so that we will grow and bear *more fruit*.

This means that if someone does *not* bear fruit, they are not truly in Christ, they are not truly a believer and will not be saved. Jesus makes this point clear with vivid language. He says, in v2, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He" (that is, the Father, the vinedresser) "takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes." The person who claims to be in Christ but bears no fruit, they will not be saved, but will be cast into the fires of judgment, because their lack of fruit shows that they are not truly in Christ at all. Jesus makes this clear in v.6: "If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." What this means is that if someone profess to be a Christian, professes to repent and believe in the gospel, but then never grows, their life stays the same, never bears any fruit of faith, then there is no evidence that they are truly saved. Indeed, if no fruit ever comes, it shows that they aren't in Christ at all, they are not truly a believer. All true Christians bear fruit because it is the evidence of faith, the fruit born from the Spirit of Christ inside of us. If we are in the vine of Christ, He changes us. No fruit means no true faith, no Spirit of God, no salvation.

This is a call for us to examine your own heart and life. Is there fruit of faith in Christ in your life? Are you bearing the fruit of one connected to Jesus? Are you abiding in Him through a real, personal relationship of sincere faith? This is also a reminder of why it's so important we love one another enough to provide spiritual accountability for each other and examine the fruit of faith - not with a critical, judgmental spirit, but out of love. This is what we do when we baptize a new believer, showing that they are giving evidence of true repentance and faith. It's what we do when we celebrate the Lord's Supper week by week. It's so important that we only show someone as being part of God's covenant people, part of the vine of Christ, if they are actually bearing the fruit of faith; otherwise, we are giving false assurance to people. If someone is only bearing thorns and thistles, we need to love them enough to provide encouragement, even gentle rebuke and correction at times, to call one another to truly abide in Christ, the only vine.

This is why Christ tells us to practice church discipline. When someone professes to be a believer but is living in unrepentant sin, refusing to turn from sin in repentance or to obey God, then we must lovingly warn them that they are producing thorns, not the fruit of faith. And if they keep chasing after sin and the world instead of Christ, even after we warn them and invite them to return, we eventually must put them out of church membership through the act of formal church discipline, and view them as unsaved. Why? Because their lack of fruit shows they are not abiding in Christ, but are like a withered branch that is thrown aside. But even so, we hope and pray that they will one day repent and come back to us, because all who truly believe in Christ *will* abide in Christ and eventually bear fruit.

But maybe you hear all that, and you feel the urgent desire to want to bear fruit, but you're asking, "How do I do that?" Change is hard; fighting sin and obedience is hard. But thankfully, God doesn't tell us to grit our teeth, muster up enough willpower, and figure it out on our own. No, He promises to give us what we need to bear fruit as we draw closer to Him and abide in Jesus. Which brings us to point 2...

II. Encouragement to Abide: If you abide in Christ, then God will answer your prayers, bear fruit in your life to His glory, and prove you're truly saved (vv.7-8)

Jesus gives us these incredible promises in vv.7-8: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" (vv.7-8). He promises all this *if you abide in Christ* and that His Words abide in you. We'll come back to how we do this in our next point. But I want us to first see the beautiful promise and encouragement Jesus is giving us here. If we abide in Him through faith, if we draw near to Christ in relational intimacy and rest in Him, He promises He will do all this in us. So what does He promise?

First, that our prayers will be answered; abide in Christ and God will give you whatever you ask and wish for in prayer (v.7). That's an amazing promise, isn't it? But God isn't promising to give you millions of dollars, a life free of sickness, and that position you've always wished for in exchange for you having enough faith or doing enough for Him. That's not what He's saying. Jesus is not a cosmic vending machine or genie in the bottle. So what is He saying? He's saying that whatever we pray and wish for *when we're abiding in Christ* will be answered. He's talking about the kind of prayers that arise from our union and intimacy with Christ. Now, we've talked about how once we believe, we are *in Christ*. That position doesn't change. But it's

also true that sometimes we're walking in that reality, and sometimes we're living contrary to it. That happens every time we sin, for example, or rely on ourselves instead of God. But when we are drawing near to Christ and abiding in Him, it changes how we think, what we desire, what we pray for. As we pray in line with Christ's heart and God's will, our prayers will be answered! Including our prayers to fight sin and bear fruit.

And so, in v.8, he promises that as we abide in Christ all the more, God will glorify His name in us by causing more and more fruit to be borne in us! And thus He proves that we are truly Christians - that we are true disciples of Christ and truly believe. This is an incredibly encouraging promise. Jesus doesn't say all this to discourage us, but encourage us!

So how can we practically abide in Christ, then? This brings us to point 3...

III. How to Abide: Abide in Christ's love by letting His Word abide in you and obeying Christ's commandments (vv.9-11)

What does it look like to abide in Christ? Jesus tells us in vv.9-10: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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." Notice that abiding in Christ is given as a *command*. We're commanded to abide in Christ. How? We are to abide in His *love*. We're also told to abide by keeping Jesus's commandments. Both of these ideas are connected to what Jesus said earlier: we abide in Christ as Christ abides in us (v.4); "If you abide in me *and my words abide in you*" (v.7). We abide in Christ by letting His Word and Spirit take greater root within us. We abide in Christ's love by resting in, dwelling in, meditating upon God's Word, the Bible, and how it unfolds the wondrous mysteries of Christ's love for us, from Genesis to Revelation. We read the Word and hide it in our heart with a prayerful posture, to draw near to Christ and dwell with Him, know Him, and rest in Him. As we rest and abide in and receive Christ's love for us, it stirs our hearts up to love Him more! And as we love Jesus more, what does it make us want to do? *Obey His commandments*. We saw this in our last chapter: three times in ch.14, Jesus said that if we love Him we will obey His commandments; then He ended the chapter by modeling it for us, saying that He is going to the cross out of obedience to the Father, to show the whole world that He loves God.

So here's a list of some practical steps you can take daily to abide in Christ: 1. First, *rest in complete dependence on Christ*. The first step is to acknowledge that you are utterly dependant on Christ for spiritual life. A branch can do nothing apart from the vine and living root

it's connected to. It is utterly dependant. And so are we. We must acknowledge our complete and utter dependance on Christ and rest in Him alone. Draw near daily and depend on Him for spiritual life, sustenance, provision, energy, and strength. Just like a plant is desperately dependant on sunlight, soil, pollination, and water, so we are desperately dependant on Jesus. And that includes an utter dependence on His *words*.

2. Secondly, *let His words abide in you*. Set aside time daily to feast on the Bible, soaking up Christ's Words like a branch soaking up water. Let God's Word take root in your heart; let the Bible fill you, feed you, reshape the way you think, feel, and live. This is a non-negotiable step. You can't abide in Christ without spending time with Him; you can't abide in Christ without letting His Word abide in you. If you're wondering why you're spiritually dry and fruitless, and you aren't reading your Bible, that's why. Make time for personal Bible reading and study. It's more important than whatever else you have going on, I promise; no matter how good and important those other things are, they will be fruitless endeavors if you do them in your own strength without first abiding in Christ, for apart from Him we cannot bear fruit.

3. Thirdly, *pray in light of Christ's love and His Word*. Part of abiding in Christ is *praying*. Your prayer life is an essential part of abiding with Jesus, spending time with Him, responding in faith to His love and to His Word. We're promised here that as we abide in Him and if His word abides in us, then we will be given whatever we ask for. Pray bold prayers about defeating sin in your life; pray bold prayers about walking in righteousness and love and holiness; pray bold prayers for the salvation of souls, the building of God's Kingdom and church, and the glory of Christ to be displayed.

4. Finally, *strive to obey Christ's commands*. We abide in the love of Christ by obeying Jesus and keeping His commands. Simply reading and studying the Word is not enough to say that the Word abides in us; if the Word of Christ abides in us, it changes us, it transforms us, it takes root, it drives us to live in light of it. We abide in Christ's love by obeying Jesus.

But what about when we sin and mess up? *We repent, and our repentance drives us back to step 1*. We confess our sin and repent, acknowledge our utter need for Christ, bringing us to a fresh acknowledgment of our desperate need for Him. It drives us back to the vine. It drives us back to the gospel, to rest in utter dependance on Christ's grace and love. It drives us back to the Word, as we feast on His gospel promises of grace and mercy and forgiveness in the cross; of His promises of redemption and salvation and sanctification. It drives to cry out in prayer, for

forgiveness, for mercy, in thanksgiving and gratitude for grace, and for greater grace and strength to go forth and sin no more. It draws us closer to Christ Jesus, and as we rest in His grace, it renews and refreshes our love for Him, growing our desire to want to obey Him and walk with Him, to abide in Him and let His Word abide in us, all the more!

Obedying Jesus is abiding in His love. It isn't a resurrected, dull life of drudgery; it's a life of love and joy! Jesus says in v.11 that He has told us all this so that His joy may be in us and our joy may be full! Abiding in Christ's love and obeying His commandments is the path to the fullness of joy. And Jesus singles out a single command specifically, in our final point...

IV. Abiding with One Another: A necessary part of abiding in Christ's love is that we love one another as Christ loved us (vv.12-17)

Jesus just commanded us to "abide in" His "love" for us. And how has Jesus loved us? Self-sacrificially. He has loved us to the uttermost by paying the ultimate cost, even by laying down His own life for us on the cross. And so it makes perfect sense that if we are truly abiding in the self-sacrificial love of Christ, the very love of God for us, then that necessarily means that we will share in His love; that we will love Him in return, but also, necessarily, love Jesus's people, Jesus's friends, those for whom Christ has also died: all of our fellow Christians, our brothers and sisters in Christ. After all, Jesus said we abide in His love by obeying His commandments, and what are the commandments that Christ has given us? We can sum up the entire Law of God, all the commandments of Jesus, with these two: love God with all that we are and loving our neighbor as ourselves. But even in this context, in the Farewell discourse, what commands is Jesus referring to? Well he started, back in ch.13, with the command to *love one another*, even in humbling, selfless, servant-hearted ways - like, for example, washing each other's feet, just like He modeled by washing His disciples smelly, dirty feet, putting Himself in the position of humble servant, even though He is Lord, to display His humble, self-sacrificial love. *That* is what we're called to obey and imitate as we abide in Christ's love. And Jesus connects the dots for us and makes this connection explicitly clear in vv.12-17.

Starting in v12, He says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Loving one another is a non-negotiable, necessary part of what it means to abide in Christ's love. It is a chief command; in fact, love for your fellow Christians is one of the necessary marks that you *are* a Christian; no one abides in Christ, the vine, without loving and abiding with the other branches. To abide with Christ, we must abide with one another. And this

isn't a call to love in name only, or just warm fuzzy feelings in our heart for Christians "out there," in a vague sense. No, this is a call for tangible, practical, visible, hands-on, costly, life-on-life love for one another. The kind of love Jesus Himself has demonstrated for us. And CHrist's love for us is most fully displayed on the cross. We see this in vv.13-17: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you, These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

In other words, Jesus is pointing us to the love He has shown us in the gospel, in His self-sacrificial love on the cross. Jesus says that the greatest act of love that exists is the self-sacrificial love of laying down one's life for His friends. And we all feel in our bones that that's true, don't we? When we see an act of selfless, sacrificial love, one dying for another, it resonates within us, moves us, doesn't it? I can remember, about this time last year, listening to the news about the assassination attempt on President Trump at the rally in Butler, PA, and hearing about how a man named Corey Comperatore died that day by throwing himself in front of his wife and daughter, shielding them from the bullets with his own body, literally laying down his life to save his loved ones. I don't cry too often, but tears started rolling down my face as I was listening to that in my car on the way to the church that day. And it wasn't just the tragedy that brought tears to my eyes (there are even sadder things we hear in the news all the time), but it was the powerful picture of love it showed: a loving husband, a loving father, who showed what it looks like to love your family more than yourself. And as moving as that is, the love that Christ has shown is infinitely more beautiful and amazing and moving. Jesus laid down his life for us - we who have sinned against Him and deserve death. We aren't even worthy to be servants in the house of God! Yet Jesus called us His friends. And then He *proved* it, proved His love, by laying down His life for us! And then Jesus called you, called each of us, by name, to Himself, appointing us to eternal life, to a redeemed relationship with God, and to a fruitful life of obedience and faith here and now. And not just individuals, but with each other.

He has appointed us not only to Himself, but *to one another*. He has made us friends, has made us family with one another. He has planted us in Himself; He is the vine, we are the

branches; to abide with Jesus we also must abide with each other. To love Jesus, we must love His Church, His Body and Bride. When we abide in Christ's love for us, we reflect the self-sacrificial love of Christ in our own hearts and lives; Christ's love takes root in us, it changes us, it moves us to love what Christ loves; to love in the *way* that Christ loves (self-sacrificially), and to love those whom He loves: His people, one another. Not grudgingly, not just tolerating one another because we have to, but genuinely *loving* and *delighting* in one another and showing our love as Christ has to us! Jesus calls us to love one another even as He has loved us, self-sacrificially loving one another as *friends*.

So let us abide in Christ's love for us and each other, brothers and sisters. Let us love one another because Christ has first loved us. Let us commit daily to abiding in Christ and letting His Word abide in us. Let us show that we are abiding in Christ's love and abiding with one another, as fellow branches in the one vine. And one of the ways we show this commitment is by taking the Lord's Supper together. This meal represents the love Christ has shown for us, the union we have with Him as we respond to and feed on His Word in faith, and our union with one another, as we corporately proclaim our faith in this gospel through this visible, tangible act of obedience. So if you are abiding in Christ this morning and the fruit of faith is evident in your life - namely, if you are repenting and believing in Christ, have professed faith in baptism, and are in good standing with a gospel believing church - then we invite you to come to the Table with us in just a moment.

But if that doesn't describe you, we ask you to just remain where you are, or to get up but just pass the table by if you need, because we don't want you to have false assurance. Claiming to be a Christian without faith and fruit leans only to being cut off and cast into the fire. We invite you to repent and believe in what this meal represents and so be united to Christ the vine through faith in Him alone. Turn to Christ; put your faith in Him; rest and abide in Christ's love for you, believe that He died in the cross for your sins and rose again so that you too can be saved! Then, you can show that you are abiding in Christ the vine as a new branch through baptism,. If you have any questions about this, we would love to speak with you after the service. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.