

Sermon: Abiding in Christ - The Source of Holiness

Text: [John 15:1-11 ESV](#)

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February 21, 2021

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I Am the True Vine

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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **3** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. **4** 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. **5** 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. **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. **7** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. **9** As the Father has loved me, so have I 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. **11** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Introduction: We ran across an important principle in our Wednesday night study of the book of Hebrews. The principle is holiness. Listen to what the writer shares with us: [Hebrews 12:14 ESV](#) **14** Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

This principle of Christ-like living is also found in our text in John this morning. Holiness is not produced in a vacuum. It has a context. Jesus tells us through John's Gospel that we must be involved with Jesus or nothing of value will result. In fact, the entire Godhead is involved in our salvation. Listen again to God's holy Word: [Titus 3:4-6 ESV](#) **4** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, **6** whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

In our text this morning, John continues his “I Am” passages having Jesus' claim to be God understood. This is also seen in the Titus passage having both God and Jesus declared “Savior.”

Just as our salvation depends on a relationship with God, so our ability to be holy also is directly connected to our relationship with Jesus. To be holy it requires we:

I. Focus on Being Like Jesus

When we take our eyes off Jesus, we can lose our way, our direction, our lives

Key Text: [John 15:1a](#) - “I am the true vine,”

A. We need a good model.

Jesus said: I am the true vine. I am genuine, real! There is a contrast being made here between Israel and Jesus. In the O.T., Israel was referred to as a vine. There is a very important passage in [Isaiah 5](#) that uses this metaphor. There, Israel is talked about as God’s vineyard, but not in flattering terms. Israel produced fruit for itself and much of it was not good. This may sound familiar in our current context about 2900 years later: [Isaiah 5:20-21 ESV](#) ²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! ²¹ Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

Jesus comes not only to produce fruit and righteousness for the Owner of the vine, but also to be a model/paradigm for others to use. Paul talks about fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. That is what he wants. In our lives, God wants us to be a witness to his “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” ([Galatians 5:22-23 ESV](#)).

Jesus stands in stark contrast to unfaithful behavior that takes its directions from the flesh or sinful nature. One should never find a Christ follower involved in “idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” ([Galatians 5:20-21 ESV](#)). This kind of unrepentant behavior will result in a person’s being cut-off from the True Vine and exclusion from heaven.

B. We have a Helper.

Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit if we are Christians. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to be holy. I think one of the biggest problems I struggle with is trying to be a Christian on my own, trying to be a good minister on my own, trying to be a good father or husband on my own. I think like me, maybe a lot of you try to do it yourself. The Holy Spirit is here to guide and encourage us through this world and provide the strength to live victoriously in Christ.

Illus. You might never guess what Tom Hillier and I were talking about last Sunday. Golf! In golf sometimes the harder you try, the shorter the drive or off-line, the shot. Many times in golf you just need to relax and not try so hard (rhythm), keep your head down (as if you are praying), and let the club do the work (God, the Holy Spirit).

There used to be an expression, maybe even a book title, years ago: “Let go and let God.” Sometimes, I think we get in the way of what God is trying to do with us.

Whatever happens in our lives, we need to:

II. Stay Connected with Jesus (Close Contact).

(Show slide (picture of a wheel) from “The Common Made Holy” by Neil T. Anderson and Robert L. Saucy, pp. 259, 262)

There are so many areas in our lives where we need Jesus:

1. Spiritual - Fellowship/Worship/Prayer/Solitude
2. Mental - Meditation/Study/Thinking/Reading
3. Physical - Rest/Diet/Exercise/Work
4. Social - Friends/Parenting/Marriage/Support

In order to bear fruit you need to stay connected to the hub. As long as these four areas stay in balance the ride can be smoother. But Christ must be at the center of your life and everything you do.

Key Text: [John 15:4 ESV](#) ⁴Abide 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.

A. So you can bear fruit

Q. Did you know that grapes do their best when it is the hottest and harshest of conditions?

The vine can live, but it chooses not to accomplish its purpose without the branches. Jesus’ analogy is a simple reminder that the Lord has made us partners in His work. He has limited himself to allow us the privilege of being conduits of His love. In Neil T. Anderson’s book, *The Common Made Holy*, I believe he is right on the mark when he says, “Instead of searching for God, we search for better programs or techniques. As a result, we burn ourselves out trying to bear fruit.”

Jesus reminds us that our heavenly Father is glorified through us. **John 15:8 ESV** 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Illus. If you think about it, too: When you look at a vine - really where do the branches start and stop? There really isn't always a clear distinction. The relationship of the branches to the vine is not so much the holding of a position, but an allowing oneself to be held and supported.

The idea would be that between us who are the branches and Jesus who is the Vine there would be a oneness and unity of purpose. The branches do not benefit from the fruit anymore than the vine. Everything is given to and for the benefit of the vinedresser (**v. 1**), who is identified as God.

We are to stay connected to Jesus:

B. To bring honor to God

Our daily goal ought to be to bring honor to God (and to have value in the eyes of others) by the way we live and by the fruit we bear. This was always Jesus' goal: "to do the will of the Father."

Jesus certainly went through some very difficult seasons to fulfill His purpose to draw everyone to Himself and ultimately to the Father. Someone has said that God wants to squeeze us like grapes in order to make a sweet wine. The pressures and pain we experience are the fingers of God working on us to affect that purpose.

I John 2:6 ESV 6 whoever says he abides in him (Jesus) ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

To do that, we need to stay connected to Jesus Who is our spiritual food and:

III. Practice, Practice, Practice

Key Text: John 15:10 ESV 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.

We need to practice obedience!

A. We need to "do right" to "feel right." - not vice versa

There are a lot of people out there today who are looking for that certain feeling or experience. There are people who are in chaos in their marriages. There are generally two reasons:

Self-centeredness instead of Christ-centeredness
Unwillingness to obey God

Both of these death-producing attitudes will cause separation from the Vine. There will be fruit only from pruning, not from being cut off. The kind of love that never quits is found in our will. It is when people covenant with each other in front of God and say: “NO MATTER WHAT.”

I see a lot of people pursuing only their feelings where they ought to be pursuing a real relationship with Jesus that includes both the mind AND heart.

B. We need to trust in Jesus.

We need to trust in His Word! We need to be involved in godly teaching. If God said it, it's true! You can count on it being a “trust-worthy saying.”

Illus. Usually children do this! You ever put your hands over your ears so as not to hear what you know is going to be said maybe even for your own good? We do that with God sometimes... There is an extensive theology of hearing in the Bible. In the book of Revelation in chapters 2-3 there are seven individual letters to seven churches. Each letter ends by saying: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Notice, too, that it is Christ who speaks to his churches: His Bride. The question is posed: is anyone listening? Or are we doing our own thing and not trusting God to instruct and lead. Someone once said that if the Holy Spirit were taken away from us, 95 percent of what we do in our churches would still go on as scheduled.

Conclusion: In our word-picture (metaphor) of the vine it is clear that growth is not the main thing - but fruitfulness. In real vines just like here, some growth is pruned and discarded so even more fruit will be produced. Brown, *John*, pp. 662-663 - The sense is not that when the hearers bear fruit, they will become his disciples, but that in bearing fruit they show they are disciples (already). Becoming or being a disciple is the same as being or remaining in Jesus.”

John 15:9 ESV 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

I pray we can have a biblical attitude, and that someday we can all more fully realize in our lives what Paul was saying to the Church: **Galatians 2:20 ESV** ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

And then what does Jesus promise on a very practical level?

John 15:10-11 ESV 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. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Illus. A long time ago, the *Saturday Evening Post* (that was our Twitter back in the day) published a cartoon depicting a man staring into his mirror. He had probably just crawled out of bed and stumbled to the wash basin. There he is staring at bloodshot eyes and stubble of beard, bags bulging under his eyes, talking to himself. "You're all I've got," he says. Wouldn't it be frightening to be in his mirror, having no(t) one else to love? Or to be one of the deluded who think they can find the best in life by looking out for only themselves? They discover that in the end, they are all they've got. And, that's not enough!

Jesus' hope is that our joy may be complete - an impossibility without love. And love is only love when it expresses itself toward others. The individual who shuts himself up in his little world to do his own thing or to be his own person, finds, in time, that life has turned against him, like a boomerang that has missed its target.

Like the boomerang, which only returns to its thrower if it has failed its mission, a person's life is also designed to hit a target ("I choose you to go and bear fruit," Jesus said). When this life fails, it returns to itself in a distorted form. Preoccupied with what he thinks, what he feels, what he wants, what he has to have, the selfish person misses joy completely. This is what Jesus says, but if you disobey Him in this matter, you cannot have joy - "Love each other as I have loved you," Jesus insists. As John says further, **I John 3:14 ESV** ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

The opposite is true, also. Without loving, we pass out of life into death. Life boomerangs.

In our holiness, let us practice love and follow Jesus, our great Example.