

Sunday, October 3, 2021

This is the tenth in a series of sermons on John 13-17 (“The Farewell Discourse”).

1. [Jesus Loves His own \(13:1\)](#) [7/5/2020]
2. [Foot Washing \(13:2-17\)](#) [8/30/2020]
3. [Identifying the Traitor \(13:18-30\)](#) [10/18/2020]
4. [Christ’s Glory and How We Are To Live In His Temporary Absence \(13:31-38\)](#) [12/6/2020]
5. [Preparing a Place \(14:1-4\)](#) [1/31/2021]
6. [The Only Way to the Father \(14:5-7\)](#) [3/21/2021]
7. [Seeing God \(14:8-14\)](#) [5/9/2021]
8. [Peace and Comfort \(14:15-27\)](#) [6/27/2021]
9. [Loving God \(14:28-31\)](#) [8/15/2021]
10. **Abiding in Christ, the True Vine (15:1-11)**
11. Friends of Christ (15:12-17)
12. The Hatred of the world (15:18- 16:4a)
13. The Work of the Holy Spirit (16:4b-15)
14. Your Sorrow Shall Be Turned Into Joy (16:16-24)
15. Prayer in His Name (16:25-32)
16. He’s Spoken That You Might Have Peace (16:33)
The High Priestly Prayer (Intercessory Prayer)
17. Jesus Prays For Himself (17:1-5)
18. Jesus Prays For His Present People (17:6-19)
19. Jesus Prays For His Future People (17:20-26)

As a refresher, this discourse occurs just hours before Jesus will be betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. We’ve made it through chapters 13 and 14, and at the end of chapter 14, Jesus says, “Arise, let us go hence.” So, I believe that as we get into chapter 15, Jesus and the eleven remaining apostles (Judas Iscariot having been dismissed) are beginning their journey through the streets of Jerusalem to the Brook Cedron, which Jesus will cross and enter into the Garden of Gethsemane after He prays in chapter 17. Today’s passage is a precious and beloved portion of scripture, and in a lot of ways it is the pinnacle of the discourse. In it, we get to learn about a most important thing: our vital union with Jesus Christ. If you don’t participate in such a union – if you don’t abide in Christ and He doesn’t abide in you – you simply have no business claiming to be a Christian. As Jesus prepares to leave to go back to the Father, it’s imperative to Him to make sure that we understand this relationship:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full.”

(John 15:1-11)

To jump right in, I'd like to break this down into three sections: "The True Vine," "Abiding In The True Vine," and "The Ultimate Result Of Abiding In The True Vine."

The True Vine

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:1-2)

In this section, Jesus introduces us to a metaphor, and there are various theories about what prompted Him to use a vine as the metaphor (the most popular are: they just finished the Lord's Supper which involved the fruit of the vine, they may have been walking by the temple which had a giant vine embossed on it, or they may have been walking by a grapevine which would have been plenteous). Whatever prompted Him, the fact is that the metaphor is beautiful in its elegance and its simplicity – He's fleshing out and illustrating a concept that He had already introduced in the previous chapter: "Ye in me, and I in you." (John 14:20). But just a reminder to everyone – every metaphor limps. In other words, don't take it too far - don't stretch it beyond what it was meant to teach – don't find some doctrine lurking in it that is explicitly denied in the rest of the Bible. For example, this passage is often used to deny the perseverance of the saints – to teach the false doctrine that true believers can lose their salvation. (See John 6:39, 10:28-29 and 1 John 2:19).

Moving on, in the metaphor, we have four players: the true vine, the husbandman, branches that do not bear fruit, and branches that do bear fruit. Jesus doesn't leave us to wonder who the true vine is – He tells us that He is. To be "true" means He's the authentic, genuine vine. It also means He's the source of truth. It was very common in the Old Testament to compare



Israel to a vine. It's all over the place. (Incidentally, outside of the Bible, Israel has commonly associated herself with vine imagery – coins minted in the Intertestamental period, during the life of Jesus, during their revolts against Rome in 66-73 AD and 132-136 AD, and even the very first coin minted in modern Israel in 1948, all have vine imagery). As the vine of the OT, Israel was an absolute failure. Where God had expected grapes, they produced "wild grapes" (poison berries, "stinkberries"). (Isaiah 5:2, 4). Where God had expected judgment and righteousness, they produced oppression and a cry (a shriek, a cry of distress).

(Isaiah 5:7). Where God had planted a "noble vine," they "turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine." (Jeremiah 2:21). If you learn anything from that, at least learn that even if all our circumstances were perfect, humans are still corrupt! We will never succeed on our own. But where Israel was an utter failure, Jesus succeeded – He is the true vine. It is by abiding in that vine that we will be fruitful. The Father has appointed that we will get all of our grace and

sustenance and power and life through the Son, and it is only by virtue of our attachment to the Son that the Father has affection for us. [Note that it's also in that vine that one day Israel will be fruitful – we find the vine imagery again in the restoration of the Jews (Isa. 27)].

He also doesn't leave us to wonder who the husbandman (or, vinedresser) is – it is God the Father. And like any good husbandman, he takes care of the vine. He gets rid of branches that don't produce fruit, and he prunes branches that are producing fruit so they will be even more fruitful. The “branches” here represent those people who are attached to Jesus in some way. The fruitless ones are the frauds. They're the ones who have made a profession of faith but don't actually have saving faith. They don't really believe. They're just along for the ride. They're attached superficially. (Remember that we're in the context of Judas having just left a few minutes earlier). Trapp calls these people “*temporaries*” and says: “*Not that they ever were in Christ, but seemed to be so; as a pole fixed in the earth, but not rooted; as a rotten leg cleaves to the body, but is no part of it; or, as warts and ulcers, which are taken away without loss to it.*” And the way that you know that they're not legitimate is because they don't produce good fruit. The fruitful ones, on the other hand, are the elect of God. God's elect will always produce good fruit. Always!

This word we see here translated “purgeth” means “to cleanse” (it's the root from where we get our English word “catharsis”). Remember that – it'll be important here in a few minutes. It refers to cleansing the branch by pruning it – getting rid of all the superfluous stuff that soaks up energy and hinders the branch from producing fruit. For people who aren't familiar with pruning, it's a little bit counterintuitive – you have to cut parts of the plant off in order to get it to produce more. And it's not always bad stuff you have to cut off – sometimes you have to cut some good stuff off in order to have better stuff. And the Father has taken it as His personal task to prune us! (Some things can be delegated, but not this). When we're producing a little bit of fruit, He's going to prune us so we'll produce more. And make no mistake - pruning can be very painful and heart-wrenching. It often comes with an affliction – many times, from afflictions that we've brought on ourselves. He needs to teach us a lesson. He needs to chasten us “that we might be partakers of his holiness.” (Hebrews 12:10). And He does that because He loves us. He doesn't love those fruitless branches – those get cut off because they're soaking up energy and resources, and getting in the way, without producing any fruit - those get cut off and thrown into the fire. But He loves us. So, friends, when you're in the middle of being pruned by the Father, don't blubber about how hard your life is, how mistreated you are, how it isn't fair, how it's everyone else's fault, etc. – instead, understand that this is the best thing that could possibly happen to you. He doesn't make mistakes. There are no accidental or haphazard cuts. He never cuts any more or less than is necessary. And He always cuts at the right time.

Now, what does He mean by “fruit”? “Fruit” can refer to a lot of different things in the Bible, but I’m going to give a very simple and broad working definition – “fruit” is any good thing that is produced as a result of God working in us. Some examples of fruit given right here in the passage before us are effectual prayer in accordance with the word of God (v. 7), loving God (v. 9), obedience to God’s commandments (v. 10), joy (v. 11), loving one another (v. 12, which, Lord willing, will be in the next sermon). Elsewhere in scripture, we have the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (Galatians 5:22-23), righteousness is a fruit (Philippians 1:11), truth is a fruit (Ephesians 5:9), etc.

Here are some thoughts I brainstormed about pruning and fruit:

- Difficult decisions must be made on what to prune and what to leave.
- Sometimes you must trim grapes off a grape cluster so the remaining fruits in the cluster grow bigger.
- Sometimes you must remove a whole cluster, so other grapes on the branch can thrive.
- Sometimes you must prune just a little bit (maintenance); sometimes you must prune so much that there’s hardly anything left (usually in dormant season).
- If you don’t prune regularly, the vine quickly gets out of control.
- Fruit isn’t all the same size and fruit doesn’t all ripen at the same time.
- Once a grape starts to show signs of ripening, it usually ripens quickly.
- Some grape clusters have a lot of grapes; some have only a few.
- Some years are bountiful; some years are not.
- Sometimes the fruit starts to grow but never ripens.
- Sometimes the fruit looks good, but it’s rotten.
- In the same cluster you can have ripe fruit, unripe fruit, and rotten fruit.
- If you pinch off a bud at the very beginning (“nip it in the bud”), it is a lot less traumatic and dramatic.
- Fruit doesn’t appear or ripen overnight – it takes time, so you can’t be too hasty in lopping off a whole branch.
- Growing and tending to plants requires patience – often, you must wait years.

Abiding In The True Vine

“Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them*

into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.” (John 15:3-10)

In this section, He explains the metaphor to us. And the key word is “abide.” The Greek word is “meno” and it is in today’s text 11 times (also translated “continue” and “remain”).

Before He gets to the command to “abide in me,” though, He gives us a little more insight into how the Father “purges” us. Do you remember how I told you to not forget that the word translated “purgeth” means “to cleanse?” It’s the same word here when He says “now ye are **clean** through the word which I have spoken unto you.” (Before, it was the verbal form; here, it's the adjectival form). We are cleaned (purged, pruned) through the word of God! Read the Bible! Just reading it performs a cleansing work in you, by the power of the Holy Spirit – it is the pruning knife used by the Father.

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12).

“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

The word was the means that God used to save you in the first place, and it is the means that He continues to use to cleanse (prune) you on your daily walk! It is the “engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). You were “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” (1 Peter 1:23). “When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word...” (Ephesians 5:25-26). “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.” (Psalm 119:9). It directs us, convicts us, comforts us, exhorts us, exposes us and reveals what and who we really are. I said earlier that this pruning “often comes with an affliction.” Beloved, when you’re afflicted or under a chastisement, it should send you straight

to the word which He has spoken to us. It is through the word that you will be cleansed. Otherwise, you won't produce more good fruit – the only fruit you will produce is the noxious fruit of anger, resentment, discontentment, bitterness, combativeness, etc. But for those who are exercised thereby, "it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." (Hebrews 12:11).

So, Jesus spends most of his explanation of the vine metaphor telling us about this mutual indwelling that we enjoy - we abide in Him, and He abides in us. There are two major questions to answer about that – what does it mean? What are the advantages of it?

What does it mean for us to abide in Him and for Him to abide in us?

This is the relationship that defines what it means to be a Christian. This is our identity. 1 Corinthians 15 tells us that every human is either "in Adam" or "in Christ." If I'm going to go around professing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I better tend to this relationship of me abiding in Christ and Christ abiding in me. This is a thing that must move beyond intellectual understanding to understanding by experience.

The message you should get from the vine imagery is intimate, uninterrupted union and communion. Picture the vine and the branches, with the vital juices flowing back and forth. It's a single plant, with constant communication between vine and branch. We abide in Him through our faith in Him, by "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5), by prayer, etc. He abides in us through the Holy Spirit, by supplying a constant stream of grace, by speaking to us through the word, etc. Further, the word "abide" means to "stay," "remain," "dwell," "settle." It has the idea of permanence. He's saying, "remain here – don't leave – don't do what Judas just did." And for a true believer who is derelict in that duty to abide, that will end with a frantic, panic-inducing search for Him if you "lose" Him for a season. Citing Song of Solomon 3 ("I sought him, but I found him not," etc.), John Owen says, *"Beware, then, of losing Christ. It may cost you much bitter searching before you find him again."*

I could probably stand up here and talk for a long time about all the things that I think this "abiding" is all about, but Jesus tells us right here in the text what He means. He equates it with two things: "my words abide in you" and "continue (or, abide) in my love." He defines the latter by "if ye keep my commandments." So, at the risk of over-simplifying this, it is required of every believer to read and meditate on the Bible (using it as a lamp for your feet – Psalm 119:105), and to love and obey Christ. And if that's the situation you're in, I have good news for you: you are abiding in Christ and Christ is abiding in you. Paul tells us: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." (Colossians 3:16). And again: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the

flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20). John tells us: “He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.” (1 John 3:24). And to be clear, I’m not talking to everybody – I’m talking to the elect of God. I’m talking to those people for whom Paul prayed “that Christ may dwell in your hearts **by faith.**” (Ephesians 3:17). Christ only dwells in His people.

What are the advantages of this mutual abiding?

1. **Fruit-bearing.** It is only insofar as we abide in Christ that we are able to produce fruit. Without Him, we can do nothing! (So much for free will). In the context, we’re talking about good fruits – it means you can’t do anything good without Jesus Christ. In the original language, there’s an emphasis on the negative – like “you absolutely cannot do anything at all without me – you don’t possess the ability.” John Flavel: “*He does not say, Without me ye can do but little, or without me ye can do nothing but with great difficulty, or without me ye can do nothing perfectly, but 'without me ye can do nothing' at all.*” If you cut the branch off the vine, the branch will lay there and die – it is incapable of producing fruit apart from the vine. But if you abide in Christ, and the Father prunes you, you can see what happens in the progression in the passage – fruit, more fruit, much fruit. It’s not good enough to just produce fruit today – you need to progress and produce more. Sometimes it’s good to take a step back and see how you fit into the big picture, and the sooner you realize that you’re a branch attached to the vine, the sooner you’ll realize that you are nothing on your own, and the better off you’ll be.

I have some grapevines in my yard – those vines don’t have to do anything special to produce grapes. They don’t have to “try.” They produce grapes because they’re grapevines, and they have the pre-conditions necessary for grapevines to do what grapevines naturally do (soil, water, sunlight, etc.). Likewise, if you abide in Christ, that is the necessary condition for you to produce fruit. If you abide in Christ, the result will be fruit. Period. It may not be a bumper crop, but you’ll produce fruit! And you don’t have to try to produce the fruit – it will come naturally. Let me suggest that if you’re trying to produce fruit on your end of the relationship, you’re looking at all this backwards. You want the fruit of the Spirit? Put your “Seven Easy Steps To The Fruit Of The Spirit” self-help guide away and abide in Christ!

2. **Answered Prayer.** If you are in a proper relationship with Jesus Christ, where you abide in Him and He abides in you, then His words will abide in you, and your prayers will be answered. Why? Because when His words abide in you, you ask things of the Lord that are consistent with the Word. You ask things that are consistent with the revealed will

of God. You do not ask things amiss, “that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” (James 4:3). You read the Bible, you pray according to the mind of Christ as revealed in the Bible, and your prayers are answered.

3. **The Father Is Glorified**. We exist to glorify God (and in fact, the Father’s glorification is one of the main themes of the whole Farewell Discourse), and the Father is glorified when we bear fruit. It’s a sad, depressing, and disappointing thing to tend to a vine only to have it produce no fruit. But it’s a joyous thing to tend to a vine and have a bountiful crop. It particularly glorifies the Father because any fruit that we bear is His own work. If I do anything good it’s because He wrought it in me. If I manifest any of the fruit of the Spirit, God did that. The only thing I bring to the table is my sin.
4. **You Are Shown To Be His Disciples**. If you abide in Christ and you produce fruit, then you have evidence that you are a true disciple. This is assurance of salvation. Jesus says elsewhere, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” (John 8:31).
5. **Abiding In His Love**. This is a wonderful thing. As you abide in Him, you will abide in His love – that is, He will lavish His love on you, and you will live in a state where you are always considering His great love for you, that He died for you, that He’s forgiven you, etc. When you don’t spend time in the word and when you disobey God, you won’t have tokens of His love for you for a season – you won’t rejoice in His love for you. It’s like standing in the sun. Every once in awhile a dark cloud comes by and cuts the sun off – the sun is still there; you’re just not seeing or feeling it for a period of time. It’s very difficult for a child of God to stay out of the word or to live in disobedience for too long – we can never be happy in that state because we can’t rejoice in God, and we can’t rejoice in our sin – it’s a miserable state to be in.

Friends – for every one of you who is in Christ, Jesus has loved you with the same love that the Father has loved Him. Let that soak in for a minute. That is an eternal, unchanging, perfect, holy love. And He tells you to continue in that love by keeping His commandments. He told us earlier, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15). There’s an element of abiding in His love that involves you behaving in such a way that you delight the one who loves you. You can’t just sit back and bask in His love for you – action is required. You must strive to keep His commandments – you’ll never do it perfectly (otherwise, pruning would never be necessary – even the best of us has some corruption that needs to be purged), but your life should be spent striving to do it. If you don’t, any evidence or assurance that you thought you had of Jesus’s love for you will dry up and float away in the wind. Follow the example of the Savior – this is how even He abides in the love of the Father, that is, by keeping His commandments. And I

hope you see that the whole thing rests firmly on loving God – if you truly love God, everything else will fall into place.

6. **Fullness Of Joy**. This is the conclusion to the whole thing, and I will get to that shortly.

On the flip side of this, what happens if you don't abide in Christ? Well, you don't get any of those things. You won't bear fruit. He's not under any obligation to hear or answer your prayers, and in fact, He hates your prayers. You will pour shame and contempt on the Father. You will have no basis upon which to claim that you are a disciple of Christ. You will not abide in His love. You will not have fullness of joy. And this is what you have to look forward to: "he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned." (See Ezekiel 15). We've all experienced a phony being cut off and cast to the side (and all the unique ways that God has brought that to pass), and we see how fast they are withered – all pretense of loving God goes out the window, and quickly. So, friends, look at the consequences of not abiding; look at everything you give up when you don't remain in Him. John Owen says, "*Carelessness concerning fellowship with Christ is evidence of a false heart.*" You better make certain that you are not being lackadaisical when it comes to the Word of God or obedience to Him.

The Ultimate Result Of Abiding In The True Vine

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full." (John 15:11)

So, we get to the conclusion, and He tells us why He just told us all these things. He didn't tell us to upset us. He didn't tell us to lay a heavy burden on us. He didn't tell us because He likes the sound of His own voice. He told us for a reason. In fact, He gives two reasons:

1. **"That my joy might remain in you."** There are a couple ways you can take this phrase "my joy." The first is that the same thing that makes Him joyful will make us joyful. And this is certainly true. In order to have true joy, we must delight in the things that God delights in. This is how we can have a spirit of joy no matter what our circumstances are. The second way to take the phrase "my joy" is that it is the joy that Jesus Christ experiences when He sees His people being obedient. You want to cause your Savior to rejoice? Then abide in Him; let His words abide in you; abide in His love; keep His commandments.
2. **"That your joy might be full."** We ought not to be a dour, gloomy people. We have plenty to rejoice in. Just look at all the benefits of abiding in Christ...and I've barely

touched the tip of the iceberg in this sermon. Matthew Mead: *“The greatest ground of joy imaginable is to have our names written in heaven.”* Some of you listening might be looking for joy in all the wrong places – the carnal man tries to figure out different ways to be happy, as long as it doesn’t involve God. But you have a sufficient and never-ending supply of joy in Jesus Christ. He’s not content to just give us joy – He wants us to have fullness of joy. Filled to the brim and overflowing. *“My cup runneth over.”* (Psalm 23:5). He wants us to have joy like the widow of Zarephath had oil – just when you think you’ve exhausted it all, there’s more to come. Obedience to God should always be a joyous thing: *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”* (1 John 5:3).

Now, we see how tightly connected abiding, loving, obeying, praying, and rejoicing are. The consequences of abiding in Christ are wonderful and joyous, and the consequences of not abiding in Him are devastating. In this metaphor, the branches of the vine are useful for only two things – producing fruit and burning. You’re either a fruitful branch who gets to be purged by the Father, have his prayers answered, glorify God, be a disciple of Jesus Christ, abide in His love, and have fulness of joy. Or you’re a fruitless branch who gets cut off, cast to the side, withers away, and then gets gathered to cast into the fire. The difference between the one and the other is the distinguishing grace and power of God, *“for without me ye can do nothing.”*

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (Jude 24-25)