

Vine and Branches #3 'Abiding in the Vine'

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the importance of abiding in Christ through free will, obedience, and a personal relationship with Him.

Scripture: John 15:1

Topics: "Abiding in Christ", "Free Will and Obedience"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the vital importance of 'abiding in the Vine' as a command from Jesus, illustrating that true spiritual life and fruitfulness come from a deep, personal connection with Christ. He explains that this relationship is not automatic but requires a conscious choice to remain in Him, highlighting the significance of free will in our faith. Tozer warns against complacency and stresses the necessity of obedience to Christ's commandments as a condition for abiding in His love. He reassures that while perfection is unattainable, God understands our human nature and desires our sincere effort to follow Him. Ultimately, Tozer encourages believers to cultivate a genuine relationship with Christ, which leads to a fulfilling and fruitful Christian life.

Transcript

"Abiding in the Vine"

Sunday, February 12, 1956

Abiding in the Vine

We are very glad that Brother Cordeg could be with us today to take the place of Brother McAfee, who as I announced this morning is in Philadelphia, or at least singing in Philadelphia today, but he was at home to attend the wedding of his only sister. He will be back the early part of this week and will resume his duties with us.

Now in John 15, I want you to read with me responsively, all reading the tenth verse down to and including verse ten. John 15. Reading responsively, and then all reading the tenth verse. 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.

Now, I think this is three or four messages that I have brought from the Vine and the Branch figure that occurs in the opening part of this chapter about which we have read. Now I want you to notice what Jesus said about abiding. Abide in Me and I in you. He said, in verse four, they put it down as a command, abide in Me and I in you. Now, that is as they say in the service, an order. Then in verse five, we have an assertion: He that abideth in Me, the same bringeth forth much fruit. In verse six we have a warning: If ye abide not in Me is cast forth as a branch. In verse seven we have a promise: If ye abide in Me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what you will and shall be done unto you. In verse 10, we have a condition: If you keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love even as I've kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.

Now naturally, when talking about the Abiding Life, we've got to define the word abiding. The word abiding here of course is a figure. As I've said several times already and explained at length, it is a figure, but let us not forget that while it is a figure, it is literal. There is not a contrast here between the figurative and the literal, because a figure declares literal truth. It is literally true that we are joined to Christ. But the figure that sets the literal truth forth is a figure of a vine. I hope that we can see that because there's much figure in the Bible. Those who do not understand may get the impression that a thing is not actually true, that it's only figuratively so.

Let me point out that when the Bible uses a figure, it always uses a figure to explain a real truth; and here is a figure "I am the Vine and ye are the branches". Now that's not a dreamy, poetic setting forth of a misty ideal. That is the stating of a truth that is as literal as the heaven and the earth. But of course, the figure under which it is set forth, it is not to be understood literally, Christ literally. Christ is not actually a vine planted in a vineyard. Neither are we actually branches on that vine. But Christ is actually a life that can be set forth as a vine, and we are joined as Christians to that life in a manner that's literally true, that it can be said that we're branches.

Now, the vine and the branch, we answer the question what it means by their abiding together. Now, the branches are joined to the vine by a union of life. "And abide in Me;" I'm rather sorry that beautiful word abide occurs here. Three hundred and thirty-four years ago, it meant a little different from what it means now. Do you remember that when Jesus was walking on the road to Emmaus with His two disciples, they said, the night is close and it's getting late, abide with us. It was an invitation to come in and stay, to come in and dwell overnight, to come in and remain there, not just for refreshments, but overnight, abide with us. And that's where the hymn Abide with Me came from I suppose. And here we have the word abide.

Now, this word abide means, continue. And since a Christian is one who is joined to Jesus Christ by a union of life, then abide means remain in that union, live on in that union, continue in that union. There is a great deal these days that will give the impression that our relation to Christ is an automatic thing. And that I do not need to think anything about it. It's automatic. It is done. And therefore, it's like your Social Security, it's automatic, or it's like your taxes, they will send you your your slip. It's automatic. There's nothing automatic in the Bible, brothers and sisters, because you see a grapevine and its branches are

vegetable life. And that is the figure the Lord used to set forth a literal and spiritual truth.

Now a grapevine with the branches growing there in somebody's yard, or in a vineyard, they have no will and no choice. A branch can't will to remain in the vine, and it can't choose to be in the vine in the first place. It was not that aspect of the of the truth that the Lord was setting forth. But, while the branch cannot make a decision, literally, that is, the branch out there in the field, that more real and literal aspect is that of persons. You see, you and I are persons, and Christ is a person. And therefore, we have wills, and we can determine and we can decide. And He said to us, now will to remain on in the vine. Determine to live on in the vine. You are in the Vine by an act of life. You're joined by life. And now we rise, says He, above the vineyard, above that. We've taken that as our point of departure, our earthly figure of speech, how we rise above that. And we say to you that while you are the branches in Me the Vine, the relationship is still higher than that, and purer and more elevated. So that, you must abide, you must desire to abide in the vine. You must will to do it. Abide in the vine He said.

So, He warned us, and promised us, and laid down the conditions, and made His commandment that we should abide in the Vine. So, we are the branches by free, personal choice. With me, it's not a small matter whether I'm a free agent or not. It is not one of those things that I can say, well, there's another school of theology that says my will is not free, and therefore I must keep an open mind. And if those who believe that the will is not free are believers in Christ, I must accept it to not make anything of it. I can't see it. I believe that there is a vast difference between whether I am in Christ because I can't help myself or whether I'm in Christ because I won't be anywhere else.

God gave to Adam and Eve free wills. I said on the radio yesterday, I'm waiting to get letters on that one. I said that the sovereignty of God and the free will of man were not in any wise inconsistent one with the other. If God sovereignly decided to give me free will, then the exercise of my free will is the exercise of the sovereign gift of God and does not cancel out God's sovereignty. They say, well, if I exercise my free will, and it's against God's will, then God's sovereignty is therefore automatically cancelled; it ceases to be, it's annulled. For if God were sovereign, then my will would be bound to Him and I would have to do what He wills. But suppose God wills to set my will free. Suppose that the Sovereign God wills that my will should be free, and that I do have a right to decide for good or evil, for God or Satan, for heaven or hell. When I exercise that will, I am not violating the will of God, I'm fulfilling that aspect of the will of God which says, I'm free to choose.

So, the sovereignty of God remains inviolate and still I'm able to choose. There is no such thing as a moral life, except there is a free life. An automaton cannot in anywise be moral. There can be no holiness where there is not freedom. God's perfect holiness is His perfect freedom. And if God were in anywise bound to be anything, then God could not be honored for being what He is. God is free, and thus has or had perfect holiness because he has perfect freedom. If I were bound to be good, then my being good would mean absolutely nothing at all. If you chain a man and make him pray, he hasn't prayed. And if you make a man be honest, he isn't necessarily an honest man. If you shut a man's mouth and tape it up and don't let him lie, he is not necessarily a truthful man. And any righteousness that is forced upon me, is no righteousness at all. There can only be sin where there can be freewill. And there can only be righteousness where there is free will. If my will is not free to choose, then I am not to in anywise get any credit, anywhere for choosing. And no man can be a holy man who is not free, because holiness means knowing what is right and knowing what is wrong, I will, by the grace of God, choose what is right. There's your good man.

So, the very basis of morality is freedom. And the very angels in heaven are there because they want to be. The ones that didn't want to be are in Hell or Tartarus waiting the judgment of the Great Day; roaming the earth as demons. But the ones who are there are there because they want to be. And there won't be a conscript angel; there isn't a conscript angel in all God Almighty's heaven. And there won't be a single conscript Christian in all the kingdom of God. There isn't today and there never was and there never will be. And heaven itself will not be a kind of a benign glorified concentration camp where everybody has to stay in; where God locks the doors at nine o'clock every night, for there's no night there, and says, now you watch it. And He says to the archangel, now keep your eye on this bunch because they had been known to wander. No, sir. Everybody that's in heaven will be there because he wouldn't be anywhere else, and he chose to be there. And everybody that's honest is so because he could be crooked, and won't be. Everybody that is decent is so, because they could be otherwise, and won't be. And if a man couldn't be otherwise and honest, then he isn't honest; he's just an automaton, a Mr. X, a guided missile, automatic man, run by somebody else's will.

So, I'm a branch, or we are branches because we choose to be branches. He says, continue, live on in Me, abide in Me and exercise your will to righteousness, your will to freedom, your your will to serve Me. The doctrine that we get converted, click, turns over the little machine and punched and recorded and that's it. I think it's a mechanized view of the Christian faith, my Brother. A wife isn't a good wife because the law makes her stay at home. No man proudly boasts of a wife that he's got chained to the davenport. He boasts because he's proud of the fact that she wouldn't be anywhere else. She could have had ten others and wouldn't take them. She chose him. Pride and the joy of possession comes only because we know our friends are free to leave us and won't. They could leave us but won't.

So, the Lord Jesus Christ, while our union is a union of life, it is also a union of will and we are in Him because we chose to be. That makes heaven the freest place in the universe. Men are in hell. They're not free in hell, but they're free in heaven. They're in hell because they must. They're in heaven because they will. They're in hell because they're bound. They're in heaven because they are free. They're in hell because God said, depart from Me. They're in heaven because they chose to be.

Now that's my concept of heaven, Brother. If I live to be 108 years old like that fellow, that 109 years old fellow, Wilson, who is the oldest soldier in the Northern Army, the only one that's left. If I live to 109 years old, I'm going to write a book about heaven. But up to now, I've been very cautious. All I can tell you is, that the heaven that I read about and sing, I wouldn't want to be caught in. I wouldn't want to go there, brother. If I meet you in heaven, it won't be that kind. The kind they sing about except of course, maybe, "Celestial City." Maybe St. Bernard and his "Jerusalem the Golden" came near it, but I'm not even sure that Bernard saw it. But I do know that the essence and fiber and foundation of Heaven will be complete freedom, absolute freedom. A man is free within the framework of His creation, free to fulfill all the broad outlines of His manifold life, His complex existence, and God will never have to keep after him with a stick. And you'll never have to have any policeman there to see that these fellows obey. They all obey because years before they chose to obey. So, we choose Jesus.

Now, being persons, we continually will to be in the vine. And we are there by meeting the conditions. Now the conditions are what? Keep Christ's commands. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love. And I assume that abiding in His love and abiding in Him are the same. We keep His conditions, "If ye keep my commandments." Now, His words are His commandments, for He says, "if ye abide, keep my words abiding in you." So, His words, His commandments; there must be a continual fulfillment. But you say Mr. Tozer, a perfect fulfillment? And I say no, not a perfect fulfillment. We're made of dust and our

Father knoweth that we are made of dust.

A magazine that doesn't like me very well, reviewed the latest book, "The Root of the Righteous." I read it today and yesterday and it said that I was ninety-percent right anyhow. I thought it's a pretty good batting average, ninety-percent. That's batting .900. But it said, if there is one, just one in it that we think is the greatest of all and that is the little piece, "God is easy to live with." They said, that's beautiful. God's easy to live with. Well, God said that to my heart a long time ago. Nobody taught me that. They taught me that God is easy to live in that He's the most congenial companion in all the wide world. That's not to degrade Him from being the high and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity. That is only to say that when He becomes our Father, and we his children, we the branches, and He the Husbandman, He understands. No branch brings forth 100% fruit. No branch comes up, I suppose, to its full possibilities. But it's the kind, proud work of the Father and of the Husbandman to bring the branch up to the fullest output that it can, seeing what it was to start with.

So, when we say, when He said, abide in My Word and keep My commandments, He did not say, now, if there's ever a failure, if you ever get a B on your card, if you ever get anything less than an A or an A-plus you're doomed. He never said that at all, and never thought it. He knows that we are dust. It might be a good thing for each other to find that out. You might put up with some things from me with a good deal more grace if you remember that I am made out of dust. Here this dust here were made in Wisconsin. God scraped that up from the hills on Wisconsin, but I'm from Pennsylvania. He scraped me up out there and put me together and put a human soul in me. So, we're dust and God knows it. We're made out of clay and dust, and dust is dust, and God knows that.

But the point is that there must be at least an approximation; He said, keep My commandments. I'm not trying to edit what He said or to soften it. I'm only saying that if He had meant you must, when you're converted, begin to keep my words without one single violation down to the end of your life, then heaven would be as empty as the inside of Bull Gannon's head. There wouldn't be anybody in it Brother except the angels, not one.

Now, what are the keeping of His commandments? Well, it means toward God, reverence and faith and worship. Towards God, reverence and faith and worship. There is such a thing as sort of lumping things and doing twenty things by doing one. For instance, the Ten Commandments. There they are, ten commandments. There they are. Do you know what Paul said we can do with them? He said, love your neighbor as you love yourself and you've kept the whole business. He lumped them all together and did them all by doing one easy thing so that all the Ten Commandments were kept. This is the fulfillment of them. He that loveth his neighbor has fulfilled the commandments.

So you see, reverence toward God covers a whole world of details. It's just like a good American who has been well brought up and is well versed in his history of his country and is proud of it, and flies the flag every holiday and votes for one of the parties and is a good American, and a lawkeeper. Well, do you know there are a thousand laws he doesn't know exist. He goes off down the highway in his car. He goes into business. He travels all around over the country and never gets into a fix anywhere he goes because the keeping of the law is inside of his heart. And if he should by any means get into a town where the ordinances vary a little bit, he might have to be talked to by a policeman, but he'd smile it off and say, "I'm sorry I'm a stranger," and get by all right. He's a law keeper by nature, he loves to, he loves his country, he's familiar with its laws and the reasons for their existence. He's a social man. And he doesn't know about the laws. He just knows that as long as he does what comes naturally, because he's a lover of his

country and a lover of decency and righteousness, he keeps out of trouble all his life. He never gets arrested. I was never arrested but once, never.

Mr. Chase took me out one time to get me bailed out. And they fined me a dollar because I traveled fifty-five miles an hour through a little town out there at 12:30 in the morning, and there wasn't a cat on the sidewalk nor a dog on the street. But they said I was going too fast, so I paid a dollar and came home. That's the only time I ever got into difficulty and that was more or less accidental. And if I hadn't had R.R. Brown in the car, I wouldn't even have done that. Because you know, when you're with R.R. Brown, you go to least fifty-five. You'll never go much less than fifty-five. So, I was driving him in Brother Hine's borrowed car, and we got arrested. But I've kept out of trouble with the law because I want to obey the law.

And you can, just by being decent, you can just take care of 1000 laws you don't even know about. But the man who's always trying to find a way to beat somebody or the law, he knows all about the laws. He has to know, because he wants to break them. But the man who doesn't want to break them can be happy from the cradle to the grave and don't know they exist.

So reverence and faith and worship; the man whose heart is reverential, who has true faith in God in Christ, and who worships God out of a pure heart fervently, he automatically keeps the laws of God. If ye abide in My words and keep my commandments. And then toward Christ, there's faith and discipleship; doing the things He tells us to do. And toward His commandments there's obedience and toward others there is love, as Jesus said as the love of Christ was. These are wonderful words. If a man keep my commandments, if ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love, even as I keep my Father's commandments and abide in His love. This is my commandment that ye have love one to another as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.

Now, Christ and His friends. Let's talk about it. A company of the saved ones, Baptists? Could be, but not necessarily. Methodists? Could be, not necessarily. Alliance people? Could be, but not necessarily. Christians churches are companies of friends of Christ. Companies of saved ones. And there always have been those companies in each age. For them, Christ laid down His life and for each other; they're willing to lay down their lives. Ye are my friends if you do what I command you. Now, no one has any authority to amend the commandments of Christ though I've heard it tried. No one has any authority to delete anything, or do any editorial tinkering with the Word of God.

Here it is. We have the Sermon on the Mount. We have the truth of God as laid down in the Epistles of Paul and Peter and John and James and the rest of them. There it is, and a happy Christian is very likely to find as he reads it, that he's been keeping it all the time out of the love of his own heart. Maybe out of selfishness, or a little up springing of the carnal flesh, he may find that he hasn't; then he repents and asks God to help him to do it. But he has no authority to change it. For instance, he has no authority to change the Word of God regarding divorce. He has no authority to change the Word of God regarding, say, giving. He has no authority to change the Word of God on anything. No editors, no unmitters, no deleters, but it stands as it is. And as we read it, God shows us where we maybe have failed in it, and then we repent and begin to do the will of God. God understands it. We're keeping His commandments, we're abiding in Him and we are his friends.

Now, I want to test my profession. Am I abiding in the Vine. Am I abiding in the Vine by God's own criterion, am I a Christian? We dare not introduce any other criterion. And I want to ask you to beware of

the person who tells you you're Christian. Nobody has any right to tell any other man, he's a Christian, nobody. Nobody has any right to go and say, "oh, I think you're a Christian all right, I wouldn't worry about it. I believe you're a Christian." No, don't you ever dare do that. You have no right to do that. The Bible says, let a man examine himself. It doesn't say that I am to examine him and pronounce him alright. The Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. If any man hath, believes in Christ, he has the witness in himself. So, it is by his own criterion. Am I living in obedience to His Word, not to the rules of my church necessarily? When the rules of the church and the Word of God conflict, then obey God, and let the rules of the church go, not the rules of my denomination, not the popular notion of Christianity; it's a deadly, dangerous thing. It's like skating on ice that's ready to break up in the Spring, to skate on the thin ice of popular Christianity. No, sir, don't you look at the rest of the people around you and say, I think I fairly well come up to their standard, and therefore everything is all right. Don't you dare do it. That's thin ice, that's ice that may plunge you down into a cold and watery grave. You dare not judge by others.

The last final proof is Christ's words. If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, then you have a right in prayer. Then you're on praying ground as they say. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch. If ye abide in me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what you will, to keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love. That's volitional abiding, that is, the abiding of my own freewill. I want to be His. And I continue to want to be His. I abide because I want to abide. And if my poor, weak will flops sometimes, if I'm ill, or if something goes wrong, or if my faith deserts me temporarily, why, I'm still abiding because I'm joined by a life union. But the Lord wants me continually to will to do His will and to do, and to abide in the Vine.

Am I living in the obedience to His Word by the final proof of faith and love and obedience? Now, you can know you see, faith and love and obedience. Is there anything that I'm not doing that I've been commanded to do? Is there anything that I'm doing that I've been commanded not to do? Here's the Word of the living God. We have the Holy Spirit as the teacher. We have prayer. We can go to God anytime and ask Him.

If I read Shakespeare until I find a passage that I don't understand, I can't go to Shakespeare because Shakespeare's dead. And if I look at the critics, maybe they don't know any more than I. But if I read the New Testament and I don't understand it, I can go to the Author and say, excuse me, what does this mean? And God has shown me. The same Holy Spirit that wrote it, is here to explain it and apply it and illuminate it. So, there's no excuse for not knowing. That is why all spiritual people agree in principle. That's why you can read what Clements said, or Athanasius or Augustine, or any of the great saints down the years to this hour and they all talk the same language.

A Methodist preacher from Texas wrote me a letter and he referred to my series on revivals, on what a revival would be. Not that I'm a revivalist, but that what a revival ought to be. And he said, when you dealt with prayer, he said it was a strange thing. I've been preaching to my people and I came up to that subject that the same week that the Alliance Weekly arrived and I read what you said about prayer. And he said, I was astonished to find those were my notes. He said, I was going to say the same thing to my people Sunday morning. And I wrote this Methodist preacher and said, I can only explain it, that if a man will listen, God will say the same thing to every man. God, the Holy Ghost will say the same thing to every man, if every man will listen. If I inject my will then I put static in the loudspeaker, and I won't half hear what God is saying, and I come to some false conclusion, but if I listen, I'm with great delight.

I read the old writers. And I find they're saying the same thing we're saying. The same Holy Ghost who taught them taught us. I wrote about dear Tom Hare, the Irish praying plumber, and I was, as I interviewed him and talked with him with long hours to get what kind of man he was. I was pleased beyond all measure to find him. He sounded like A.B. Simpson. And AB Simpson sounded like Meister Eckhart. Meister Eckhart sounded like Augustine, Augustine sounded like Paul. The same Holy Ghost saying the same thing to different people. And I don't think outside of Paul that my brother Tom ever heard of any of these others; never heard of them. He just reads the Bible. But he prays and prays and the Holy Ghost said to him the same thing what he said to them and what he says to me.

So my Brethren, there's the Word of God. You can abide in the Vine with all of its rich life, all of its glorious wealth and spiritual treasure, just by willing to abide and obeying the Word, keeping the terms of the covenant, which are very simple after all. Be reverent, be loving, be worshipful, and obey the Word as you see it and as you read it. God understands. And if you fail, why He knows where you failed. If you tell Him you're sorry, He pardons instantly and wipes the tears away. Abiding in the Vine has branches to wonderful life my Brethren, a wonderful life. And I want to testify that I don't need any religious trinkets to keep me happy in Jesus. If we had a five-headed alligator here playing the xylophone, I wouldn't come to church to see it. I have what I need, I'm joined to the Vine and the sweet juices of the Holy Ghost that flow out of Jesus Christ are in the mind, perfectly satisfying me in my spiritual life. So I don't need a circus and get along beautifully without it and cut down the overhead expense. Alright.

Now that's all for tonight. And we're going to close in prayer. Would you bow your heads?

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