

'The Disciples' Relationship With Jesus, the Father & Each other.' Ch. 15 (Keswick Convention 1973)

by Eric J. Alexander

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fellowship with Jesus Christ, the Father, and one another, and the purpose of union with Christ is to bear fruit (holiness of life and character).

Duration: 1:01:30

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 10:28, John 14:1, John 15:1-18, John 16:1-4, John 16:33

Topics: "Disciples"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on John chapter 15, where Jesus is ministering to his disciples on the last night of his earthly life. Jesus emphasizes the importance of bearing fruit, which refers to qualities of Christian character. The speaker explains that fruitfulness depends on three things: being connected to Jesus, being pruned by God, and abiding in God's word. The initial cleansing of justification is just the beginning, and God continues to work in our lives to produce fruit.

Transcript

Now we turn this morning to the 15th chapter of Saint John's Gospel. And I hope that this morning I may be enabled to be kinder to you in terms of time. My wife always tells me that when I say I'm going to be brief today, I'm usually twice as long.

Our passage for this morning is not the whole of John chapter 15, as you will see from the outline, but the first 17 verses of the chapter. At verse 18 of John chapter 15, our Lord seems to me to turn to a subject which has taken on into the 16th chapter, and it's in that context that I hope we may look at it tomorrow morning. But this morning, John chapter 15, verses 1 to 17.

Let me simply remind you that in this 15th chapter, our Lord Jesus Christ is still exercising this gracious and wonderful caring ministry for his disciples, as they face with fear and trembling the prospect of our Lord's departure. They are here on this last night of his earthly life, and he is coming to them with a heart that is overflowing to them. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end, and here is his ministry of love and care for them.

But in the wider context, of course, our Lord's words in these chapters are his ministry to believers who are under pressure, who are knowing what it is to go through the same kind of tribulation, the pressures of the world, the flesh, and the devil, in the whole period between his going to the Father and his return in glory. And therefore this ministry is a ministry which is very directly to us this morning, as well as to the disciples in the upper room. Now if the great appeal of chapter 14 of John's gospel is for faith, and we saw something of that yesterday, believe in me, is Jesus' repeated appeal to the disciples.

The great appeal of chapter 15 is for fellowship, abide in me, is the repeated appeal of this chapter, and it is a fellowship which is threefold. First of all it is fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ through our vital union with him. I am the vine, verse 5, you are the branches.

He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. So it is fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ through our vital union with him. Secondly it is a fellowship with the Father through his careful and faithful husbandry in our lives.

Verse 1, I am the true vine, my Father is the vine dresser, and there is a fellowship with the Father to which the Lord Jesus Christ draws us here. And thirdly it is a fellowship with one another through our mutual love in Christ and our obedience to his commandment. Verse 12, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

Now if we were to divide the passage verses 1 to 17, verses 1 to 11 are concerned with the first two elements in that fellowship, and verses 12 to 17 are concerned largely with the third. Now if our Lord Jesus has an overriding aim in this passage in John 15, it seems to me that it is not so much the urging upon us of our duty to abide in Christ, it is rather to show the disciples what abundant provision God has made for them in his Son. I think this is the great emphasis of the passage, not so much the urging upon us of a duty, as the revelation to us of the abundance of God's provision for the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Jesus does this by emphasizing something which has grown to be very wonderful to me as I've been studying these verses. He emphasizes this truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is not just a friend who has the transforming effect upon the believer that many friendships do have. You know how friendships can produce in us a sense of security.

They can produce in us a stimulus to a different kind of life. But what Jesus is saying in John chapter 15 is not just that he has come to be a friend, to have the transforming effect upon us that friendship has, he is an abode for the believer. He is a home to dwell in, richly furnished with all the fullness of the blessing of God and with all the wealth of heaven.

Now that's what Jesus is to the believer, and this is what he is seeking to impress upon the disciples in this chapter. And he shows us this truth by showing us something of the glorious teaching that derives from that great and blessed truth of which the apostle Paul makes so much in his epistles, the doctrine of our union with Christ. You'll remember how Paul sees the Christian fundamentally in these terms, and it's Paul's great classic phrase, the Christian is a man in Christ.

In 2nd Corinthians 5, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. In Ephesians chapter 1, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. And that is our position if we are Christians.

If you are a child of God this morning, this is the fundamental truth about you. Above everything else, you are a woman in Christ Jesus. At one time, you were outside of Christ, separated from him.

But now what grace has done, it has brought you to be in Christ Jesus. And all the resources the believer needs in this world are in Christ. Now, the New Testament teaches us about our union with Christ by using various metaphors with which you will be familiar.

Sometimes we are limbs in a body, sometimes we are living stones in a building. But here our Lord's metaphor is that peculiarly appropriate metaphor, and that great biblical metaphor of the believer being branches in the verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. Now the real background of this metaphor in verse 1 is not so much the possible existence of a vine near the upper room with its tendrils trailing down over the window as may well have been the case, but rather the body of teaching in the Old Testament scriptures where God's vine is the nation of Israel.

You may be familiar with this, let me give you some of the references in Psalm 80 verses 8 to 16, in Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 21, in Ezekiel chapter 15 and chapter 19, and in Hosea chapter 10. In so many places throughout the Old Testament, you get the picture of Israel as God's vine. Perhaps the best known is Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1 to 7. The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.

So the vine is a symbol of Israel, and the picture it presents is that salvation is to be found in being incorporated into this nation. Israel is God's chosen people. He has chosen a people for himself.

As he draws people to himself, he incorporates them into this nation, and Israel is God's vine, and he means to produce his fruit in the world through this vine. But the vine is a symbol of something more than this in the Old Testament. It is not only a symbol of Israel, the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting.

It is in the Old Testament also a symbol of failure. Not God's failure, because God asks the question, what more could I have done with my vineyard than I have done with it? He proceeds to tell us everything that he has done. He has lavished his care upon it.

He has poured out his attention on it. He has done everything that could be done for the vineyard, and yet the vine is a symbol of failure, and the failure is this. It's the failure of Israel.

Isaiah chapter 5 verse 4, when I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? Jeremiah 2 21, I planted you a choice vine. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine? There is God's lamentation over his vine, you see, as he has lavished his care upon it, as he has planted it, as he has walked to and fro caring for the vine. He says it has become a wild vine.

It is degenerate, and in Ezekiel 19 12, the vine was plucked up in fury and cast down to the ground. The east wind dried it up, and its fruit was stripped off. Now it is against that background of Israel's failure as the false vine, that Jesus stands in John chapter 15 verse 1, and says, I am the true vine.

Not the true as opposed to the untrue, but the true as opposed to the false, the Greek word means. The one which is spurious, the degenerate vine, the failed vine, and he is standing here over against the whole background of Israel, you see. God's chosen vine, and he says in the light of that failure, I am the true vine, and salvation now means being incorporated into me.

Now this allegory of the vine tells us how we can share in the life and abundance which is in the Lord Jesus Christ. May we pause for a moment to see how we do so in two ways, and it is part of the significance of the allegory of the vine. The first is by derivation.

That's how the branch, as you will notice, obtains its life from the vine. It has no life of its own. It derives all life that it has, all its potential for fruitfulness, everything that it has of life, and vigor, and strength, and reality, it derives from the vine.

If you sever the branch from the vine, it's both lifeless and useless. So it is with the believer, says Jesus in verse 5, apart from me you can do nothing, and every spiritual grace, and every evidence of spiritual life in us, is derived from our union with Christ. But it is not only by derivation, it is also by identification.

While Jesus says he is the vine and we are the branches, there is another sense in which branches and vine are identified with each other. And by this metaphor, Jesus is describing that union of which he spoke in John chapter 14 verse 20, where he says, in that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. And this is that gracious identification whereby all the riches that are Christ's by nature, become ours by identification with him.

So there is the picture of the man who is joined to the Lord, to use Paul's lovely phrase in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, and engrafted into Christ. He derives all that he is, and all his potential, and everything of good within him, from the vine. And all the riches of God and of glory that are in Christ Jesus, by nature, we obtain from him, by identification.

But now we must go on to ask, what is the great purpose of this union with Christ, which has been effected in us by God's grace? Well, when you turn to John 15, there is no mistaking the answer to this. It is fruit. In verse 2, every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bring forth more fruit.

Verse 5, he who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. And the great purpose for which we are united to Christ, and engrafted into him as branches into the vine, is that we might bear fruit. Now, of course, the allegory of the vine is uniquely suitable for drawing out this teaching.

The vine is useful for nothing else but fruit. This is what it is for, and this is why it's such an appropriate metaphor. It is not for wood.

The wood of the vine is classically useless. It's not for foliage. It's not for flower.

The great purpose of the vine is to produce fruit. That's what it's for, and that's what Christians who are joined to the Lord are for. They are for the production of fruit, and this is the great burden of our Lord's ministry in these verses.

It's a very vital thing, my Christian friends, for us to discover exactly what it is that we are for in the world. It is an appalling and a dangerous thing that there are so many Christian people who drift through so many years of their lives without ever stopping to ask what it is that they are for in the world, and that's why you get this lack of a real sense of focus in Christian living, a real sense of purpose. Have you discovered what you are for yet? Well, here is the answer.

Like the branches on the vine, you are for the production of fruit, and this is what Christian salvation is all about. Now, although it's common to interpret this fruit bearing in terms of service and witness, I have come to the conclusion that bearing fruit does not primarily mean, as it's often taken to mean, winning

souls. So, we speak about somebody who has had a very fruitful ministry.

Now, it is very true, of course, that that's a wonderful thing to see God doing through you, and we ought to covet that kind of fruit and pray for it, but the weight of biblical teaching seems to me to be that fruit is not so much that kind of success, but holiness of life and character and Christ-likeness in our daily living. That is what Jesus is concerned about as he says, the Father is to prune you and you are to abide in me in order that you may bear fruit. This is certainly how the Old Testament uses this language.

In Isaiah chapter 5, God comes to look for fruit on his vine, and what is the fruit that he looks for? Isaiah says he looked for justice, and behold bloodshed. He looked for righteousness, but behold a cry. In other words, they were moral qualities of godly character that God is looking for, and it was the absence of that fruit that breaks the heart of God, and he says, what more could I have done? But the fruit was not there.

Not only does the Old Testament use it in this way, John the Baptist uses it in this way. In Matthew 3 verse 8, you'll remember where he comes and pleads, bear fruit that befits repentance, and John's great concern was for the evidence of a change of character. Now Jesus uses the word in this way too in the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew 7 20, he is speaking about the lack of righteousness in the Pharisees. He is speaking about the false shepherds, those who appear to be on the outside, what they are not in fact inside, and when he is speaking about this kind of godly character for which he looks penetrating behind all disguises, he says, by their fruits ye shall know them, and the apostle Paul uses it in this way. In Romans 6 22, you have your fruit unto holiness, and in Galatians 5 22, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and so on.

Well now, it seems to me therefore that Dr. Leon Morris is right when he says although this fruit is not defined, we need have no doubt that it is qualities of Christian character which are in mind as elsewhere in the New Testament. Now the pressing question is, how can we bear this kind of fruit? If this is why God has incorporated us into Christ, if this is what his great saving design is in our lives beloved, and it is, the issue is, how can I bear this kind of fruit? How can I become this kind of man? What is the secret of becoming a branch in the vine that is really bearing fruit to the glory of God? Well in these early verses of John 15, Jesus describes particularly three things on which fruitfulness depends, and I want to draw your attention to them fairly briefly. It depends first of all upon our belonging to the vine.

In verse 2, the Father distinguishes between branches which belong to the vine and those who are merely intertwined with it and associated with it. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bring forth more fruit. And in verse 6, you find an amplification of this negative side of the Father's distinguishing.

If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. Now I suggest to you that the basic teaching of that part of the chapter is that our fruit bearing depends upon our belonging to the vine. The first kind of branch which belongs is pruned.

The second kind of branch which does not belong is cast out. The illustration of the first would be the disciples. The illustration of the second would be Judas Iscariot, and that illustration would still be very vivid in the minds of the disciples as they remembered how our Lord had not just seen him slink out of the door, but the Lord Jesus had dismissed him.

What thou doest, do quickly, and he is taken out, cast out. And then there is the appalling story of the end of Judas Iscariot. Now there may be some questions raised about how Jesus can speak of someone being in the vine, and yet taken away, and cast out, and burned.

Let us not bypass such a question as that in case it is in somebody's mind. How is it that someone can be said to be in the vine, or a branch in me, and yet to be taken away, and in verse 6 to be cast forth as a branch, withered, and then burned in the fire? Well, let me say one or two things about this. First, this is one of these places where one must never press the details of an allegory like this too far, and particularly to make it contradict other scriptures.

That's a very important principle in interpreting the Bible, that we are never to build our doctrine upon truth drawn by analogy from this kind of metaphor, and particularly to make it conflict with other parts of the scripture. For example, to go no further away than John chapter 10 verse 28. The question that people are asking when they are concerned about this kind of thing, is it possible for somebody to be a believer incorporated into the vine, and yet to be taken out, and cast out, and burned? Well, now here is what Jesus says about that question in John 10 verse 28.

I give them, that is my sheep who hear my voice, and follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

I and my Father are one, so where are you as a believer? You are in the hand of the great shepherd of the sheep, and nobody can snatch you out of his hand. Ah, but more says Jesus, you are in the hand of my Father. I and my Father are one, and you cannot be snatched out of such great mighty grasps as this.

So thou, Lord Jesus Christ, is not a few chapters later on teaching the reverse of what he taught in chapter 10. But secondly, this specific personal example of what Jesus is here speaking about, namely Judas Iscariot, perhaps gives us the key to what our Lord is meaning. He was the man, you will remember, who appeared to share everything with the other disciples, who appeared to share the mind and purpose of the master, who was even given a position of responsibility in the company.

He kept the bag, you will remember. He was the treasurer, and yet the time came when the Lord recognized that every appearance had been false, and that he didn't really belong. It's belonging that matters, you see.

Listen to the words of John Calvin. It may be asked, he says, whether anyone engrafted into Christ can be fruitless. I reply that many are reckoned by men's opinions to be in the vine, who in fact have no root in the vine.

Now the whole point of the analogy is, you see, at this point, that the production of fruit is ultimately the only reliable evidence of belonging to the vine. That is the only reliable evidence, beloved, that a man is in Christ is the evidence of the beginnings, at least, of our godly character. May we pause in our thinking to ask, how then do we come to belong to the vine? Well, one answer would be by faith.

When we speak about believing in the New Testament, it is believing into the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember, that's the great significance of this word, pistuineis, believing into the Lord Jesus Christ, and by faith we are united into the Lord Jesus. It is, therefore, a faith union, and when you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, this is what happened.

You were believing into him. You were being brought in to this faith union with him, and belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ is by personal saving faith. It would be possible, secondly, to answer that question, how do we belong? By saying that we are united to Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, by one spirit, we are all baptized into the one body. How do we become limbs in the body then? We are baptized by the Holy Spirit. This is his work to incorporate us into Christ as the body, and we are the limbs.

Do you know, if you wanted an even fuller answer than that, it is not only by faith and by the work of the Holy Spirit. We are in Christ this morning, my dear Christian brothers and sisters, you and I. We are in Christ supremely by the Lord's gracious choice. That's what Jesus is saying at the end of this passage.

You did not choose me but I chose you. Well, of course we chose him, but the great vital thing is he chose us. And the apostle Paul, when he's speaking about our union with Christ, he says we were chosen in him before the foundation of the world.

And this union is not only a faith union and a spiritual union, it is an eternal union. It depends upon belonging. You notice secondly, it depends upon pruning by the Father.

John Stott says in his comment on verse 2, God the Father is pictured here as an indefatigable gardener. And that's a very good description of what God the Father is. He is an indefatigable gardener out for fruitfulness in the branches.

He is not, in other words, content, you see, to leave them to themselves. He is constant and thorough in his care and concern for fruit. Now, I know what an indefatigable gardener is.

Isn't that a difficult phrase to say? Dear old John Stott, he's about the only man who could say that clearly, isn't he? I know what an indefatigable gardener is because one used to live next door to me. It's a very embarrassing thing to have an indefatigable gardener next door to you. And from the crack of dawn in the morning until last thing at night there, he was out.

He had nothing else to do, of course. He was retired. He was out over his garden and he was looking at all the flowers and he would pluck out something there and cut back something here.

It's the picture of a man, you see, who, wherever he sees evidences of growth, begins to set about dealing with the place because he longs to see a harvest. He longs to see fruit. And so it is that whenever God the Father sees evidences of life, he takes his pruning knife to husband the resources of that life for fruit.

You'll notice in verse 3 that God is not satisfied when we are justified. It is to justification that verse 3 refers. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you.

That is the initial cleansing to which Jesus refers in John 13. That is what justification is, the initial work of grace. But Jesus says it's only the beginning.

My dear children, he says to these disciples, this is only the beginning of what the Lord has to do for you. It's not the end. It's not a terminus.

It's a starting point. And he is the indefatigable garner who sets about pruning the vine that it may produce fruit. And the great principle is, apparently, according to our Lord, that the fruitfulness of the vine depends upon the faithfulness of the pruning.

Otherwise, you see, the possibility is that the life of the vine may be diverted into something other and less than fruit bearing. Bishop Westcott says in his commentary on John, everything is removed from the branch which tends to divert the vital power from the production of fruit. Now do you see how Jesus is putting the tribulation and trials of the disciples into a different light? Remember that he is still ministering to these heart weary, broken disciples who are facing all the confusion and turmoil of these days.

He is facing men who are going through the mill spiritually. And I do not doubt that there are many servants of God who are going through the mill here this morning. Now see how this puts it in a different context altogether and sheds light on our adversity and tribulation.

He is describing it as the gracious, purposeful work of the Father's pruning. So that when he comes with this knife that seems so harsh and sharp and painful and applies it to the life. And when these men are smarting under the blow, Jesus says, oh you can trust my Father because he is the husband man and he has a great purpose in view.

He has a great end in view and it is fruit for his glory. Do you know these words of Amy Carmichael, that godly woman with the beautiful mind? Isn't it a wonderful thing how the Lord gives to people like that a mind which becomes beautiful and thinks thoughts that are so gracious? Well Amy Carmichael was that kind of woman. She went out as a missionary to India from this very convention and her life was shot through and through with suffering of many kinds.

She is writing about pruning under the heading, rid me good Lord of every diverting thing. And she says this, what prodigal waste it appears to be to see scattered on the floor the bright green leaves on the bare stem bleeding in a hundred places from the sharp steel. But with a tried and trusted husbandman there is not a random stroke in it all.

Nothing cut away which it would not have been lost to keep and gain to lose. Not a random stroke in it all. That's a great prayer is it not? Rid me good Lord of every diverting thing.

I think it was W. P. Nicholson to whom Mr. Craig was referring last night, that great rough-hewn man of God in Ireland who said to an audience one night, if the devil can't keep you from getting converted he'll bend all his powers to get you diverted. And beloved I tell you as a pastor who cares for men and women one of the most heartbreaking things in the whole world is to see a man or woman whose life has begun to show signs of promise in whose heart there has begun to be evidences of grace and then they've been diverted. I wonder if there is a Christian man or woman here in Keswick this morning and the story of your life is like that.

It may be through a relationship. It may be through something that came to you at one time that God was telling you to do and you refused him and you've been diverted. The Father's pruning work is the counterpart of this.

Is not this why Paul so often speaks of tribulation working for us? A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Our light affliction he says worketh for us. Do you see what this is? God the Father is putting our tribulations to work.

He is employing them in his service and it's the tribulation so often which is the pruning knife of the Father to bring glory into your life. Do you know the story of the missionary who went out still wondering about so much that had happened in his life and so many things that God had been doing to him that seemed

mysterious and when he got out to the mission field he was walking one day along a pathway and came to a little bush and saw there hanging and he was a man who was very interested in these things and noticed it immediately. The chrysalis of a butterfly and there it was and the butterfly was just about to emerge and he saw in this chrysalis that tremendous struggle that does go on before the butterfly emerges.

He saw the writhing and the struggling and the tribulation and he put his hand into his pocket and he took out a pen knife and he began carefully to slit up the shell of the chrysalis and the butterfly emerged. All the tribulation stopped and all the agony was done and it emerged and he looked at it and discovered that it came out a poor deformed creature and he learned then that day that it was the tribulation that put glory into the That's how we are to see the conflicts and trials of our lives beloved. They are the very fabric of the father's gracious work.

I come across so many people who are in the midst of this kind of thing that I stay with it for one moment. Do you know these words of John Newton? John Newton was a great man of God who wrote some of the greatest hymns in the hymnary but this one is in hardly any. I asked the Lord that I might grow in faith and love and every grace.

Might more of his salvation know and seek more earnestly his face. I hoped that in some favored hour at once he'd answer my request and by his love's constraining power subdue my sins and give me rest. Instead of this he made me feel the hidden evils of my heart and let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part.

Yea more with his own hand he seemed intent to aggravate my woe crossed all the fair designs I schemed blasted my gourds and laid me low. Lord why is this I trembling cried will thou pursue thy worm to death? Tis in this way the Lord replied I answer prayer for grace and faith these inward trials I employ from self and pride to set thee free and break thy schemes of earthly joy that thou may seek thine all. In me fruitfulness depends on belonging to the vine on pruning by the father and thirdly on abiding in Christ abide in me and I in you.

Verse four fruitfulness is conditional upon abiding and if the emphasis of belonging to the vine is upon union with Christ the emphasis of abiding in the vine is upon communion with Christ and you'll notice that there are two sides to it in verse four abide in me and I in you there is our abiding in Christ and Christ's abiding in us. He abides in us as the God who is at work in us to will and to do his good pleasure as Paul tells us in Philippians chapter 2 and we are to recognize that truth and glory in it. We abide in him when we cultivate a communion of heart and mind and will with him which is deepening every day and this is to be the great business of our life abide in me.

Now this whole idea of abiding in Christ has been distorted partly I think because of some hymns which have misused the word as though it meant lolling or relaxing. When I was a young Christian we used to sing hymns like this about constantly abiding and it may just have been my perversity but I always had the picture in my mind of a man strung up between two trees on a hammock on a calm summer's day with a do not disturb notice over his life and this is what it meant to be constantly abiding. Well you will of course probably not have had that idea at all but that was certainly the idea I used to get from this kind of thing but abiding in Christ is not a passive thing like that it is an active thing it is pressing on into Christ against all the tendencies of the world the flesh and the devil.

It is the great pursuit of the apostle Paul that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering being made conformable to his death. It is pressing towards the mark it is

focusing the life in Paul's words this one thing I do that's what it is to abide in Christ beloved. Bishop Westcott says whatever leads to this is good whatever hinders this is bad whatever does not bear on this is futile and this is what Jesus is calling us to it is pressing into him with all our being that we might know the fullness that is in Christ as an abode for the believer.

How then are we to abide in Christ? Are there some guidelines Jesus gives us? Well in verses seven and ten you will notice there are two equations which are made which give us some help. Verse seven if you abide in me and my words abide in you ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you. Verse ten if you keep my commandment you will abide in my love just as I have kept my father's commandment and abide in his love.

Now in verse seven there is a parallel drawn between our abiding in Christ and his words abiding in us. If you abide in me and my words abide in you and Sir Edwin Hoskins one of the great commentators on the fourth gospel says of verse seven the phrase abide in me is expanded and defined as the abiding of the words of the Lord and the disciples. So that abiding in Christ is to let God's word sink into the very depths of your being to feed upon it to let it become part of the fiber of your life.

When Spurgeon was urging this upon his students one day he said brethren this is the thing that makes a minister of God get into the word soak it up lap it up drink it up get your heart and mind and body into it until your very blood becomes bibline. That's great he was a great old boy. How do we abide in Christ? By letting his word abide in us.

Now in verse 10 he equates abiding in his love with keeping his commandment. If you keep my commandment you will abide in my love and the Lord Jesus communion with the father as so often in John is the pattern. Now Hoskins again says to abide in his love and to keep his commandments are therefore but two modes of saying the same thing.

Now will you look beloved as we put the two truths of verses 7 and 10 together we may say that we abide in Christ by making his word our earnest study and by making his commandments our daily delight. Therefore abiding in Christ is really a moral rather than a mystical matter. May I quote Bishop Ryle to you again our Lord he says guards us against supposing that a mere indolent abiding in him with a dreamy mystical kind of religion is what he means.

His words must be like a burning fire within us and constantly actuating our characters so that abiding fruitfulness Christian holiness is the outgrowth of our life which obeys the commandment of Jesus abide in him. And let me say this there is no more a shortcut to that kind of biblical holiness than there is a shortcut to growing grapes on a vine. It's a very significant thing that the Bible always speaks of Christian holiness in horticultural terms never in mechanical terms.

It's never the pulling of a lever or the pressing of a button it's the growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And beloved we need to be aware of this because we live in an age of instant things. Some of them are a great blessing like instant coffee.

I don't know if instant coffee does very much for my sanctification but my wife if she were here would tell you it does a great deal for my perseverance. Some of them are a great blessing but some of them are a great error like instant holiness. There is no way to fruitfulness of the kind that impresses God but by abiding in the vine.

Well now from verse 7 to 11 the Lord Jesus goes on to speak of four privileges inherited by the believer who is abiding in Christ and they are all for the sharing of privileges which are already Christ's. First verse 7 the privilege of answered prayer. Now of course that is a privilege which is our Lord's already.

I know that thou hearest me always he says to the father I know that thou hearest me always. Now he says to the disciples if you abide in me and my words abide in you ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you. Now what's the connection between abiding in Christ and answered prayer? There are two things.

First prayer depends not so much on the words I speak as on the man I am. The fruitful life which is abiding in Christ is the real secret of authority and power in prayer. That's why you can't compartmentalize a man's life and speak about something that his prayer life dissociate from the rest of his life.

The second thing is that his as his words abide in us. Our minds are schooled and our wills are molded to his mind and to his will so that we desire and ask what pleases him. That's the key to this apparently dangerous promise that Jesus makes.

Do you notice the daring of the Lord Jesus where he says to the disciples if you abide in me and my words abide in you ask whatever you will and it shall be done. We see there is a daring thing for the Lord to say to these disciples but you see if his words abide in them then their minds are conformed and their wills are bent to the will and the mind of the Lord and the things that they ask and the things they desire are the things that please him. That's the key the privilege of prayer.

Secondly verse eight the privilege of glorifying the father. By this my father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove yourself to be my disciples. Now there is a blessed privilege indeed.

Hitherto Jesus says in chapter 13 31 that God is glorified in his son. So that is a privilege enjoyed by the Lord Jesus. God the father is glorified in his son but now he is also said to be glorified in fruitful believers and the reason is that we shall be as we abide in him all unknown to ourselves.

Gradually changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the spirit of the Lord. The privilege of glorifying the father. Verses nine and ten the privilege of a family love.

Verse nine as the father has loved me so have I loved you. Oh you know we skip over verses like that don't we? Let that sink into you. This morning as the father has loved me so have I loved you.

If you keep my commandments verse ten you will abide in my love just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. What love the father has for the son our poor minds just cannot comprehend. That's something that's outside of our ethos altogether.

But it is a love we at least know which takes an infinite delight in the son and this is the love of Christ for us. Now says Jesus that love will be your abode. This will be the abode of the believer it will be the element in which you live and that's a wonderfully healing thing isn't it? That's what these men were so greatly needing to know you see in all the wounds that were gradually being exposed in their hearts they were needing to know that their dwelling place was in the love of Jesus which was like the love of the father for the son.

Fourthly the privilege of sharing Christ's joy. Verse 11 these things I've spoken unto you that is the things about belonging to the vine and being pruned by the father and abiding in Christ. He has spoken them all

with this great aim in view that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

Now do you notice this is what Jesus has in view you see this is his aim all along it is for the glory of the father it is for the blessing of the church of God it is for the need of a sick and tired and needy and perverted world but it is for your joy too you see. George Matheson writes in that great hymn that he wrote when he was going blind wasn't it oh love that will not let me go he says oh joy that seeketh me through pain. Beloved we need to be convinced of this what is Christ's joy? Well Christ's joy is not an effervescent frothy kind of thing there are many Christian people who misunderstand what Christian joy is it's not Christian shwepervesence it's something infinitely deeper than this and the Lord Jesus says I have a joy to give to you and my aim and end in all my dealings with you is joy.

Now I say again we need to be convinced of this because the devil is constantly at work seeking to convince us of the reverse as he does with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden he is out to cramp your life he's out to impoverish you he's out to filch away all the happiness and fullness that life can bring the Lord Jesus said it's alive from hell. My great burden is to bring you my joy that's why you see you can bow yourself with a glad abandon to the will of God don't we talk about the will of God in such a strange way as Christians you know some frightfully appalling thing comes and we say oh well it's another disaster but it must be the will of God you know or we say oh well we'll accept it as the will of God well of course one knows what people mean when they're going through dark days with that kind of thing but you know the will of God is good and perfect and acceptable to his children because it's the road to joy.

Now from verse 12 to verse 17 Jesus is turning to the fellowship they are to have with each other this is my commandment he had been speaking about fulfilling his commandments what is the commandment well this is my commandment in verse 12 that you love one another as I have loved you each individual branch must have a certain relationship with the vine but since all the branches belong to the same vine they inevitably have a relationship with each other the same is true with all these metaphors of our union with Christ if we are sheep in a flock then beloved if you have a shepherd standing in the middle of a field and the sheep are all over the field as you bring the sheep nearer to the shepherd in coming nearer to the shepherd they come nearer to one another if you have limbs in a body

when the limbs start working against each other and not coordinately that's a mark of sickness in the body for the limbs are intended to work together for the satisfaction of the head now we have already seen that abiding in Christ can be equated with keeping his commandments and one of his commandments is this that you love one another and this paragraph begins and ends with that same commandment you will notice the paragraph 12 to 17 in the revised standard version that's how it's printed anyway this I command you to love one another Bishop Ryle comments on that truths which our master thinks it needful to enforce on us by repetition must be of primary importance and here he would have us to know that we can never think too highly of love attach too much weight to it labor too much to

practice it there are two things that Jesus has to say about this love as we draw to a close first it is commanded by the Lord Jesus himself in other words love amongst brethren is not an optional luxury for those who are blessed with a nice nature it is a divine obligation and the reason we find it difficult to see how love can be commanded is an evidence of how much we misunderstand the nature of Christian love and think of it as something which has its origins in the person we are loving and arouses an emotion therefore enough but you see Christian love is not stimulated by the one who loves who is loved but by the one loving it is not to use John Stott's excellent phrase the victim of our emotions but the servant of our will that's what God's love is like it has no cause in its object

but in itself and one vital mark of the Christian who is in Christ is that he loves like that secondly it's revealed in Jesus himself verse 12 halfway through the verse through to the end of verse 13 greater love has no man than this that a man lays down his life for his friends and you are to love one another as I have loved you now my love says Jesus as this character as he describes it in verse 13 and this leads us to the very heart of the matter doesn't it the nature of Christian love is self-giving and that means that the opposite of Christian love is not hatred but self-love and that's the reason that so many of us find it difficult to love it's got nothing to do with our temperament it is that we are so much in love with ourselves that we are unable to love others finally in verses

14 to 16 Jesus gives the disciples two very gracious words of assurance first the assurance of his friendship he longs to draw them nearer to you he says you are my friends I don't want to call you servants longer because he wants to bring them to a more intimate place than the servants he's drawing them in you see I have called you friends but you will notice that this is a friendship of a different sort from the friendship we have with each other it's a friendship which involves obedience the lesser title of servant is included in the greater title of friend and finally the assurance of his election verse 16 you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should abide and that beloved is our anchor and our stay that we

go out as those on whom the hand of the Lord our God has been laid mystery of mysteries from before the foundation of the world and that's what gives us our eternal security and the ethical energy to go and be fruitful men and women in a world that doesn't

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