

Abiding in Christ

by Robert B. Thompson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of abiding in Christ, and living in and by the Lord Jesus, in order to bring forth the image of Christ in our lives and to live a life of righteousness and praise.

Topics: "Christian Living", "Sanctification"

Description

Robert B. Thompson preaches about God the Father planting a spiritual Vine, symbolizing Christ, and watching over it to produce the fruit of righteousness and praise visible to the nations. Believers are the branches of Christ, expected to exhibit righteous behavior reflecting His image. Abiding in Christ is crucial, as failing to bear fruit may result in removal from the Vine. The sermon emphasizes the ongoing transformation believers experience by abiding in Christ, bringing forth the godly characteristics of the Kingdom of God.

Transcript

God the Father has planted a Vine and He is watching over it and taking care of it. The Vine is spiritual but its fruit is visible in the earth. The fruit of the Vine is righteousness and praise, and the fruit will appear in the sight of the nations of the earth. The fruit is the moral light of the world. When the nations witness the righteous behavior of the saints they will glorify God.

Christ is the Vine. We Christians are the branches. God is looking for fruit in our lives, the fruit which is the image of His Son, the fruit of righteous behavior. If we do not exhibit righteousness and praise in our personality God will remove us from Christ. "Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away."

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)

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The Vine is spiritual but its fruit is visible in the earth. The fruit of the Vine is righteousness and praise, and the fruit will appear in the sight of the nations of the earth.

For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:11)

Christ is the Vine. We Christians are the branches. God is looking for the fruit of righteousness in our lives, the fruit that is the image of His Son. The image of Christ is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These are the characteristics of Christ and of the Kingdom of God.

As we abide in Christ His godly image begins to appear in our personality and also in the personalities of those to whom we are ministering. We are bringing forth righteousness and praise, the godliness of the Kingdom, in our own lives and in the lives of others.

The reason God has joined us to Christ is that we may bring forth the fruit of righteousness in our lives. When the nations of the earth witness our righteous behavior they will glorify God.

God has called us to be the moral light of the world. If we do not exhibit righteousness and praise in our life, God will remove us from Christ. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away."

If the image of Christ is not revealed in our personality we stand in danger of being removed from God's Vine.

The teaching of Christ and His Apostles focused on two things: (1) gaining eternal life; and (2) salvation and rewards in the Day of the Lord, in the day when Jesus appears in the clouds of the heaven.

Little is said in the Scriptures about what happens to us when we die. Rather the emphasis is on what happens to us when the Lord Jesus returns, and on living in righteousness, holiness, and obedience to God in the present world. When the Apostles of the Lamb preached salvation they were speaking of not being destroyed in the Day of the Lord.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. (Acts 24:25)

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; (Romans 2:5)

We would not stress this point except that it has a direct, practical bearing on how we live in the world. If we think of the Christian redemption as being a plan for admitting us to Heaven when we die we do not understand the absolute necessity for abiding in Christ in our present life.

Current preaching admonishes us to hold our "ticket" of belief in the facts of the atonement and resurrection, with the idea that such a doctrinal position is "saving faith." As far as we know, there is no scriptural evidence that grace operates during the judgment that takes place after we die.

The penalty for not abiding in Christ is that we will be removed from the Vine today. We must understand that every day we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. If we go through life in the hope of being admitted to Paradise when we die (supposing this to be the goal of redemption), but are not abiding carefully and consistently in Christ, we will miss the program of salvation.

We do not have to strain to bear fruit. The fruit of godliness is the natural result of abiding consistently and continually in Christ. It is abiding in Christ that must become the focus of our attention.

Every day of our Christian pilgrimage, abiding in Christ is a little more difficult than the preceding day. Why is this?

When the Lord Jesus first receives us into Himself He accepts our entire personality. We experience a sense of being without guilt in the sight of God, and the Scripture confirms this position. We then may imagine that the Lord is entirely pleased with our person.

The fact is, He has received us with all our sinful, self-seeking ways. We are in no condition to abide in the Presence of God. We are naked and do not know it. It is the blood of Jesus that has made our warm welcome possible. Jesus has received our self-willed, sinful personality into His own Being. He has received discord and rebellion into Himself. He does this because He loves us--even in our sinful state.

Then Christ begins to bring our personality into harmony with Himself. Each day of our pilgrimage there is a lesson in godliness presented to us. There is an evil that must be dealt with that day. The program of transformation is quite painful because every sin and every trace of self-love and self-centeredness in us must be exposed to the fire of God. It is an eternal transformation, a new creation. This is why it becomes increasingly difficult to abide in Christ.

It is more difficult as the days go by because of the increased demands. But it is true also that we have increased spiritual wisdom and strength with which to meet the increased demands, and so the next step is possible and joyous.

The Lord receives us today. Tomorrow He steps back a pace, as it were, and says, "Find Me here!" Then we must press into that new position. The following day He steps further back and says, "Follow Me here." And so on and on to the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This is what it means to abide in Christ.

Our abiding in Christ today is different from our abiding in Him a year ago. More is required of us. Sins that we practiced unknowingly a year ago are not permitted today.

The self-love in which we indulged a year ago is not acceptable today.

All victorious saints will recognize instantly the pattern we have just described. The Lord Jesus challenges us each day to a fuller abiding in Himself. He is purging from His own Body the sinfulness and self-seeking He absorbed when He first received us.

It may be true that the majority of believers are not abiding in Christ. They are continuing their acknowledgment of the facts of the atonement and resurrection, calling Jesus, Lord and Savior under the assumption that this is their ticket to the life and world in which they will find themselves after they die physically.

The issue in the Scriptures is eternal life. Eternal life is not a place, it is a relationship to God through Christ. We have eternal life now. We are growing in eternal life, and our bodies will be raised into eternal life when the Lord appears. Salvation is past, present, and future.

The true Christians are those who are beginning to bring forth the image of Christ in their lives. The image of Christ is being revealed because they are giving their attention each day to abiding in Christ, to following Him carefully in overcoming the evil of the day. Being a saint is a full-time calling.

If we do not abide carefully in Christ each day but spend most of our time and strength on the things of the world, not abiding in prayer, in the Word, in fellowship with fervent saints, we will lose the all-important

immediate contact with Jesus. Without realizing it we will grow cold. We still may be following our church procedures but we have left our first love. God is not in all our thoughts.

Christ no longer is emphatically first in our life . When this becomes true to any significant extent we are in danger of being removed from the Vine, removed from Christ. In what state, then, will we be when we die physically?

Christ receives us as we are when we come to Him as sinners.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24)

The traditional interpretation of John 5:24 is that if we make a profession of belief in Christ, believing in God, we never will be judged. The Judgment Seat of Christ will be a kind of sports awards banquet in which some get first prize, some second prize, and some honorable mention. We never will suffer pain and so there is no serious threat here.

This cannot be the true interpretation; for in John 15:2 we are threatened with the most terrible of fates--that of being removed from the Vine. What, then, is the true interpretation of John 5:24, the interpretation that is in harmony with the entire teaching of Jesus and the teaching of Paul and the other Apostles?

John 5:24 is speaking of passing now from spiritual death into the eternal Life of the Spirit of God--the Life that Jesus Himself Is. The verse, as is true also of John 15:2, is speaking of our union with Christ.

Whenever an individual hears the Word of Christ and believes in God who has sent Christ, he passes into eternal life. Christ receives him, as we have stated previously, in spite of the sinfulness and rebelliousness of his life. Although the sin and self-will still are present, the atoning blood answers to the demands of Divine justice. Satan points the finger in vain. God's sense of equity has been satisfied fully. There is not and cannot be any condemnation.

What happens next? The individual must abide in Christ. As long as he abides in Christ, as long as he is sanctified (set apart unto Christ; living a holy life unto the Lord), he is acceptable to God. The blood keeps on making up the difference between the believer's imperfections and the moral image of Christ.

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)

"Them that are sanctified." Those who are being set apart as holy to the Lord.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. (II Corinthians 6:17)

We remain under the blood as long as we walk in the light of God's will.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. (I John 1:7)

It does not say, by one offering He has perfected forever them who believe, but "them that are sanctified," who are set apart to Jesus; who are abiding in Jesus; who are walking in the Light of the Presence of God in Christ. The New International Version says "those who are being made holy."

The argument may be advanced that we are sanctified by faith. This is true provided we are referring to a living faith and not to dead doctrinal belief. The true faith, the faith that results in eternal life, produces a transformation of the believer. True faith keeps us abiding in Christ, and observable fruit proceeds from the abiding. Faith that does not produce righteous behavior is not what the New Testament means by faith.

There is confusion today regarding the definition of the term faith.

Some define faith as adherence to fundamental (by their standard) doctrine. Others define faith as a magic that gets you what you want. The faith of the Scriptures is neither belief in doctrine nor magic. True faith is a trust in God through Christ that causes the believer to live in and by the Lord Jesus. The result of living in and by the Lord Jesus is a transformed personality. If any person is in Christ a new creation is coming forth; otherwise he is not in Christ.

Continual abiding brings continual freedom from condemnation.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

To "walk in the light" is to abide in Christ, to keep one's self in the center of God's will. As long as we are abiding in Christ, remaining sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, trusting in the Lord's wisdom instead of our own, the blood is cleansing us. We are without condemnation. We are "perfect" in the sight of the Lord.

We always must give the prime attention and energies of our life to the problem of abiding in Christ. Why is abiding in Christ a problem? It is a problem, especially in a wealthy nation (the rich enter the Kingdom of God with great difficulty), because so many things press on us constantly that work against our abiding in Christ.

The television is one of these hostile forces. The television seeks to conform our thinking and desires to the ways of the world. Satan, the lust of our flesh, and our self-centeredness and self-love also strive to hold our attention. Satan desires that we worship him. Satan remains on the alert, looking for ways in which to turn our attention away from Christ.

Both eternal death and eternal life are working in the believer. Each day either death prevails or life prevails. The gate is narrow and the way is resistant that lead to eternal life. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Way to life. We enter through Him and then the struggle begins. The warfare that the saint wages is not, ordinarily, a physical or even a mental struggle. Rather it is a spiritual struggle that works in terms of faith and patience.

We must address ourselves to gaining the Life in Christ, always setting our will to do the will of God. Apart from such a resolute setting of the will there can be little victory in our walk in Christ.

We must continue deciding to do what we know to be God's will; and when we are not sure of God's will we are to continue choosing to do what to the best of our knowledge is pleasing to Christ.

The Christian life is a warfare. Our goal is to abide always in the perfect center of the Person and will of Christ. As we do we are changed into the image of Christ; the will of God begins to be brought forth in the persons and circumstances that are around us; and our prayers gain greatly in power with God.

The major issue is life--eternal life. The nations of the earth are perishing for want of life--the Life that Christ is. That Life is the truth, the only light and truth available to people that will endure to eternity.

As soon as the branches of the true Vine have been brought to perfection, to the standard that is the stature of the fullness of Christ, the eternal life and light of God will be brought forth to the nations of the earth.

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17:21)

"That the world may believe."

The purpose of the maturing of the branches of the true Vine is that the nations of the world may believe that God has sent Jesus.

Eternal Life will flow from the Vine through the branches to the peoples of the earth, bringing life and deliverance to them.

And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh. (Ezekiel 47:9)

The nations of the earth will be converted because of the life and light that will come to them through the branches of the true Vine. This is the climax of the fulfillment of that which the Lord Jesus spoke, saying, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." (John 15:5)

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:3)

The nations of the earth are waiting for the branches to learn to abide in the Vine. As soon as the branches are established in the Vine, the Life of God in Christ will flow through the branches and release the prisoners of the earth from the cruel bondage into which Satan has brought them.

Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (Romans 8:21)

The greatest need of the present hour is for the true witness of God to be borne before the people of the world. There is an abundance of "ministry" but a lack of the true witness. The witness of God is first in righteousness, second in power. It is the righteousness and power coming from the Holy Spirit that reveal to people the Person, will, and way of the God of Heaven. Power without righteousness is the witness of Satan.

When the nations behold righteousness and praise in the saints, and the supernatural power of the Spirit, they will glorify God. They will see our good works and glorify God. This is the true testimony for which people are waiting.

Having your conversation [behavior] honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12)

The goal of God is to bring righteousness, peace, and joy through the Holy Spirit into the earth. This is the coming to the earth of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom from Heaven. The bringing of Heaven into the earth is the Divine purpose emphasized in the Scriptures.

To this end God has planted a Vine in the earth. The Vine is Christ. Christ is the Dwelling Place of God. All the Life and Fullness of God abide in Him.

But in the Father's "house" there are many rooms. The many rooms are the branches of the true Vine.

The one true Vine is the Father's house. Those who abide in the Vine are the many rooms in the Father's house.

Christ receives the elect into Himself, baptizing them by the Spirit of God into His own Body. After that, the elect have one supreme objective for the remainder of their lives--perhaps for the remainder of eternity. This objective is to bring, through the Spirit, their entire personalities wholly into Christ, remaining in Christ at all times and in every situation. It is a lifelong project requiring our undivided consecration and attention.

One by one the saints are perfected in Christ and then plucked from the earth. They include all the righteous from Abel to the victorious Christian who went to be with the Lord a few minutes ago. They all are abiding in the Presence of the Lord, waiting for the last trumpet to sound. Then they will descend from Heaven as the army of the Lord, the Life and Light of God Almighty shining through them, to accomplish their task of driving sin and death out of the creation and filling the earth with the knowledge of the Glory of the Lord.

God has planted a true Vine. One day in the not too distant future the branches from that Vine will fill the whole earth. Then the nations of the saved will behold the righteousness and praise of God, and beholding will be transformed into the same image.

He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. (Isaiah 27:6)

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